

S E R M O N S
ON
DIFFERENT SUBJECTS,

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V O L. II.

L O N D O N:
PRINTED FOR J. F. AND C. RIVINGTON, AND
J. JOHNSON, IN ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD;
AND C. DILLY, IN THE POULTRY.

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P. 185, l. 17, for *God*, r. *Him*. P. 196, l. 9, add *or*. P. 220, l.
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SER-

S E R M O N I.

ON A DOUBTFUL MIND.

LUKE xii. 29.

Neither be ye of doubtful mind.

THE precepts of our blessed Lord, though short and easy, are wonderfully comprehensive, and equally calculated to explain our duty and promote our happiness. They are not, for the most part, such as the philosopher would form, over the midnight lamp, by solitary meditation; but they are “the gracious words of one who knew our wants, and could help our infirmities.” Though the admonition of the text will be at all times salutary and practically useful; yet it

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was

was more immediately necessary for those to whom it was addressed. A more than ordinary portion of fortitude was requisite for those chosen few, who were to correct the vices, and support the cruelties of a wicked and superstitious world. Whatever might have been the conviction of their own minds, and however the mild virtues of the gospel might have shed a lustre over their own lives, it required steadiness of principle and firmness of resolution to enforce its doctrines, and communicate its truths to others. A doubtful, timid, or wavering state of mind would have rendered their preaching useless, and their example of none effect.

THE same fluctuating disposition, or anxious suspense, is attended with many sorrows and many serious evils in every condition of life. There is not a human being, perhaps, who has not experienced misery from it, in the hour of temptation, or under the painful conflict of opposing principles and passions. Let us consider, then, how
by



by obstructing our duty, it undermines our happiness, and by what means we might escape its dangers and vexations.

FIRST, a doubtful mind, serves in every respect to multiply the sorrows of life. Placed in such a scene of discipline and trial, as requires the constant exertion of the soul, to grasp at some promised good, or to shrink from some threatening evil, what can we expect from the man, who takes the field, without any sure guide to direct his steps, or any fixed principle to support his courage? What, but cowardice, perplexity and terror? Like a skiff on the wide extended ocean, without a pilot or a helm, he is drifted about by every squall that blows, and liable to founder on the first rock. He is involved in difficulties, which ought not to have caused him a struggle, and often overwhelmed with distresses, which others, who acted from principles that were previously formed, had sufficient prudence to foresee, and

when foreseen, sufficient fortitude to avoid.

THERE is nothing, indeed, so necessary to human happiness, as clear and decisive notions of duty ; I do not mean such notions as exist merely in the understanding, like mathematical axioms, but such as may calm the affections, when disorder is first breaking forth ; such as may, at all times, apply to the heart and direct the conduct. And why do we dignify ourselves with the appellation of rational creatures, unless we exert the superior faculties with which we are endowed to promote our real happiness ? Reason is of little value, unless it enables us to obviate difficulties and provide against misfortunes. Between those who blindly follow the impulses of nature, and one who irresolutely sees the progress of evil, and but faintly struggles to avoid it till his happiness is enthralled, there is little difference, perhaps, in point of respectability ; the grand distinction is,

is, that the latter is more wretched than the former.

BESIDES, the man of “ a doubtful “ mind” will find his peace disturbed by every tumult of the imagination. Always in suspense about what is real good and what is not, or balancing the punishments of vice with present enjoyment, visions of delusive pleasure will continually float before his eyes, and banish from his bosom the chearfulness of contentment, or mislead him from his duty.

FOR want of some grand object in view, which would supply him with steadiness of principle to regulate his actions, he is tempted by every trifling gratification to stray from the common path of life: for doubt and hesitation imply the suspension of reason, and then passion is ever ready to pour evil into the heart. Not only the vicious propensities of nature might thus acquire dominion over us; but even the

most benevolent dispositions might be perverted, and lead to misery and guilt.

FROM the same imperfection of character, the dignity of human nature is debased. He who on every trial of duty is ready, like the idolatrous Israelites, "to halt between two opinions," is the mere child of passion. The higher faculties of the soul are of no advantage to his happiness, or support to his virtue. They rather embarrass and distress him. He waits till the feeble contest shall cease, and then yields himself up the slave of a momentary or adventitious impulse.

FROM this abundant source of evil and of error proceed also those minor vices of the heart, which equally affect our own happiness, and that of our fellow-creatures. Such as fickleness of character, inconsistency of conduct, caprice, timidity, and I will add, cowardice. These produce such mortification and disgrace as the mere world-

worldling will dread, perhaps, more than the condemnation of religion, or the neglect of the most serious duties ; yet these he must expect to find in his own bosom, unless his mind is fortified by steady principles, and his conduct governed by a determined pursuit of virtue.

SUCH principles and such protection it is the privilege only of religion to bestow. Nothing can act as a sufficient counterpoise against the temptations of the world, the gratifications of appetite, and the indulgence of passion, but the belief of a God and the dispensations of his providence. If we resolutely embrace, as the vital spring of action, the revealed word of that Almighty Being, who is “ the Creator “ of all worlds, and Judge of all men ;” on whose favor depend the blessings of futurity, and on whose displeasure the terrors of eternity are suspended ; then, and then only, we might hope to see the duties of human nature practised with constancy, and the virtues of the heart supported by fortitude.

BUT in that "doubtful mind" against which our Saviour guarded his disciples, I know not what christian perfection, or mental excellence, can exist. It is in vain to hope for constancy where there is no fixed principle; it is in vain to look for practical wisdom where every scruple occasions perplexity; and surely there can be no true magnanimity, while every difficulty suspends the powers of action, and every danger terrifies or alarms. Besides, the obligations of duty will be slightly felt by one, who in the moment of temptation is always ready to doubt their force; and he can never be said to enjoy the blessings of providence, whose goodness he sometimes questions, and sometimes, perhaps, denies.

WELL, therefore, might our blessed Redeemer caution us against this evil disorder of the soul, and well might he assert of the half-formed christian, and the hesitating infidel, "He that is not with me is
" against me."

BUT

BUT doubtfulness of mind, as we have hitherto considered it, might proceed from causes which, we hope, are venial; it might arise from casual negligence, and be increased by natural infirmities. It might spring up in the season of calamity, before the soul is acquainted with its own powers, or formed to virtue by the needful discipline of life. It will always surprise those whom adversity has never forced to think, and who would catch at the promiscuous enjoyments of *PASSION*, without relinquishing their sense of *DUTY*.

BUT it often proceeds from a more depraved source. There are many who will encourage this evil habit, from the most selfish and corrupt motives. The votary of pleasure and the man of the world cherish it, as a principle of comfort and of ease. They experience none of the distresses which attend the conflicts of an ingenuous mind. Their view is gratification. They wish not to have any struggles with reason, or with conscience; but
to

to hang as loose from all obligation as possible. By doubting, therefore, the truth of religion, the propriety of her restraints, and the sanction of her laws, they form a very convenient system of conduct for themselves, equally adapted, as the predominate passion takes place, for carrying on the schemes of licentious pleasure, or prosecuting the plans of worldly advantage. Mention to the man of a doubtful mind duties which he neglects to practise, he can tell you of the prejudices of education ; the different manners of different times and countries ; the endless diversity of the human character, and the uncertainty of real good, as it regards beings who widely differ from each other in opinion, in the strength and tendency of their passions, in their original constitution, and the natural powers of their minds. Hint to him the necessity of extending his enquiries, and improving his mind with useful knowledge, he will attempt to excuse his indolence, and yet foster his vanity, by asserting, perhaps, that the wisest of philosophers affirmed of him-

himself, " All that I know for certain is,
" that I know nothing."

THERE is, indeed, scarcely a duty of life which a wicked man might not, by this universal expedient of a doubtful mind, calmly and systematically transgress. In vain you might prove the existence, and enlarge on the perfections of the Deity, the benefits of Revelation, and the reasonableness of imitating, what we cannot but adore ; in vain you might preach the immortality of the soul, the necessity of a future judgment, and enforce the whole duty of man by urging the heavenly example of a Saviour ; all these illustrious truths will have no influence on his conduct, who is not prepared to take any decided part in the grand drama of human life ; but floats at large down the stream of time, and wishes not to receive any impulse but from the gratification of the present moment.

THE institutions of society may restrain such characters from plunder and devastation ;

tion ; self-love and interest may teach them some of the PRUDENT duties ; but if you would inculcate the more exalted virtues of the heart, either from arguments derived from reason, or religion, your exhortations will be of no more avail than “ tinkling brass, or a sounding cymbal.” Unless there be some moral soundness and energy of mind ; some of that godly sincerity which makes a man ASHAMED of deceiving others, and AFRAID of playing the hypocrite with himself ; unless there be, above all, an earnest desire of passing through this life, so as not to dread the rebuke of our own conscience, in the hour of death, and the displeasure of the Almighty, at the day of judgment ; it is in vain that religion offers her promises, and virtue holds out her rewards ; you might as well sing to “ the deaf adder, that “ stoppeth her ears, and hears not the “ voice of the charmer, charm he never “ so wisely.”

THIS

THIS doubtful and unsettled state of mind, therefore, is the source of GENERAL evil and disorder. It disqualifies us for the more important duties of life, and incapacitates us for real happiness. You might be led, perhaps, to pity it merely as a weakness or a folly. But when it originates from such principles as have been mentioned, you ought to fear it in others, and dread it in yourselves. The man of a licentious disposition, who riots in the enjoyment of vice and sensuality, as the declared votary of pleasure, or watches the moment of advantage as the servile slave of the world; who saps the foundation of every duty with the idle vanities of scepticism, and who can "sit in the seat of the scornful," when such subjects are mentioned as every good man thinks of with trembling hope, with reverence and awe; such a man spreads corruption through the small circle of domestic life, as the deadly drug poisons the fountain's stream.

IF you know the real benefits of society, therefore, and associate with your fellow-creatures from proper motives, you will not often frequent the company of those who have no principle of action, but selfish and promiscuous enjoyment; whether this nothingness of character proceeds from vanity, indolence or vice. But if, on all occasions, you are ready to make one of the throng, without thinking of MOTIVES, and without caring for what you may see, or hear; then, indeed, the libertine will be more welcome to your habitations than the sincere christian; and little can be expected from the steadiness of your own principles, or your ability to form the minds of those who ought to be most dear to you.

BUT, further, the evil disposition, which has been the subject of our present meditation, is nearly allied to many of the meaner vices and degrading qualities of the mind. Independent of the real practice of virtue, nothing gives us greater pleasure to contemplate and observe in a fellow-creature,

creature, than a certain manliness and identity of character, whose general tendency we can always discover; a sort of ingenuous candor and liberality of soul, that is supported by the virtues of truth and justice. We would not wish that the man to whom we open our hearts, or with whom our happiness is at all connected, should have any thing dark, doubtful, or suspicious in his conduct. It is from an unbounded confidence in the wisdom, justice and mercy of the Divine Being, that the pious contemplate their dependence on him, with the most exalted pleasure; and amidst the tumults of passion, and the distresses of life, enjoy that "peace which passeth all understanding." But the man of a doubtful mind makes no approach to those perfections of character; perfections which teach us to cherish for our fellow-creatures that "love which casteth out all fear," and that stedfast belief in God, which leads us to pour out our souls to Him in prayer, and consider Him on all occasions, as "the rock of our salvation." In the hour of difficulty
and

and trial, perhaps, our doubtful friend shocks us with shame-faced neutrality ; when we expect the support of friendship, or need the kind offices of benevolence, he might shrink from us, with such cautious prudence, or cruel insensibility, as the Priest and the Levite passed by the wounded traveller. He flattered our vanity, perhaps, only to betray our weakness, and cultivated our friendship only to promote his interest.

To sum up this odious character, we cannot be assured how he will act on any important concern of life ; it is probable, he does not know himself ; but as he possesses no principles of duty derived from the love of man, or the reverence of God, we must often expect to find instances of selfishness and ingratitude, folly and caprice.

BUT let us not be severe ; to act from constant and invariable motives of truth, benevolence and justice, free from the counteraction of human passions and infirmities, is not to be expected of man. This is the
2 privilege

privilege only of that Almighty Being
“ with whom there is no variableness,
“ neither shadow of turning ;” who said
“ let there be light, and there was light ;”
who fixed the stars in the firmament of
heaven, and gave regularity to the motion
of revolving worlds.

It should be our peculiar glory, that
we can raise our thoughts to HIM, and
from his works, learn to adore his per-
fections. But were it not for the spirit
placed within us, “ that vital spark of hea-
venly fire,” that feeble emanation from the
Father of lights, we should be lost in the
immensity of the creation ; and that would
be lost to us : we might see, indeed, but
we should see only as the gazing brute,
and like him, labor, feed and die. As
it is, various are the evils that restrain
the free exercise of our intellectual facul-
ties, and that render this world a scene
of discipline and trial, “ the vale of dark-
“ ness and the shadow of death.” Yet
we must remember that this is not our

resting-place ; we see enough to point out a hereafter, and we enjoy blessings sufficient to “ lift up our hearts unto the “ Lord.” Had we more knowledge, and could we possess additional powers, we might, indeed, be better and more exalted creatures, but then this world would no longer be our proper school of discipline.

IN the present state of human nature, therefore, we are sometimes surprised by temptation when we thought ourselves secure ; sometimes oppressed with calamities, when our hearts dreamed only of happiness ; and sometimes embarrassed with difficulties which we could neither foresee, nor comprehend. On such trying occasions, the best men might occasionally feel doubt and perplexity ; and if they should ever be led into folly or inconsistency of conduct, by this frailty of the mind, they will lament and study to correct it, as one of the evils of their nature : they will not, like the gross sensualist, or the selfish worldling, have recourse to it as a motive to palliate
their

their vices or justify their errors ; but will take particular care that it shall not intrench upon their duty, though it may occasionally annoy their peace.

YET however the dangers and uncertainties of life may sometimes keep the soul in suspense between the agitations of hope and fear, anxiety and care ; there are subjects of the highest importance on which we may cultivate, and ought to possess, the most perfect confidence. These are the goodness of divine providence ; the truths of revealed religion ; our relation to the Father of all being, and our necessary dependence on his mercy. Wretched, indeed, would be the state of man, if in the hour of calamity, he had no other source of comfort but what the world affords ! Wretched would it be for him, who has just tasted of “ the cup of blessing,” to reflect, that the grave was to close for ever over all his enjoyments ; and still more wretched would it be for “ the man of sorrows” to reflect, that death was to annihilate the very

resting-place ; we see enough to point out a hereafter, and we enjoy blessings sufficient to “ lift up our hearts unto the “ Lord.” Had we more knowledge, and could we possess additional powers, we might, indeed, be better and more exalted creatures, but then this world would no longer be our proper school of discipline.

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HOPE of happiness ! Under the various despondencies of thought, and every kind of suffering, religion offers herself as a mediator, between the creature and the Creator, administering comfort to the human soul.

AFTER all the idle discussions of philosophers, she will be found, under different forms, indeed, to be the grand support of virtue and of happiness. Religion alone can bid us hope, without dreading the anguish of disappointment, and is the universal tie which unites time to eternity, and connects the sufferings of the virtuous with the blessedness of heaven.

WOULD you, therefore, avoid the disorder of evil passions, the terror and perplexity of walking with one foot on the precipice of guilt, and the other on the mere boundaries of duty ? would you learn to guard against the first approach of sin, and act with firmness and decision, on every important occasion of life ? cultivate religion, as “ the only anchor of the soul,
“ that

“that is both sure and steadfast.” Though adversity might overtake you, and the heart might be “pierced through with many sorrows,” yet do not let this shake your confidence in the mercy and goodness of God. Rather remember, that the Saviour of the world was “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief,” and hath declared, “Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted.” Let it teach you to consider your relation to the Almighty Father as more INTIMATE, and your dependence on him more NECESSARY. Learn to reflect, also, that the storm of affliction might be as necessary in the moral world, as is the tempest that agitates the waters, and purifies the air.

WERE I to enlarge on the motives that should induce every rational being to clear the mind of doubt, as much as possible, on this important subject, I might write volumes. But as the grand fault of man is not ignorance, but negligence in the performance of his duty, I shall only mention a few.

LET me first exhort you to consider, whether you can, in conscience, acquit yourselves of guilt, if the doubtfulness of your mind, and the unsteadiness of your religious principles, arise merely from indolence and indifference? Would you not be alarmed, in the hour of death, if you had reason to dread, that the glorious prize of immortality was lost, and that without a contest? Still more cause would there be for the most terrifying apprehensions, if you should have reason to doubt, when all other doubtings are past, that the evil disorder of your mind, and the irregularity of your conduct, sprung wholly from vanity, selfishness and vice.

IF you can shake off these dangerous slumbers of the soul, or break through the charm of indolence and pleasure, let your first meditations be directed to the existence of God; and you most assuredly will learn not only that "He is, but that he is a
"rewarder of them that diligently seek
"him." Next, consider the nature of the
human

human soul, and the only rational view which an all-perfect Being COULD have, apparent to human wisdom, in calling us into this probationary world. Dwell also on those hopes which dawned on the human mind, in a state of nature, like the faint meteors that stream on the darkness of the night: And, lastly, consider with the most serious attention and the deepest humility, the evidences of that glorious Revelation by which “the day-spring from
“on high hath visited us,” and the bright hopes of immortality have been confirmed.

THE motives that should exhort us to this great work are infinite; among which let me remind you of the grandeur and importance of the subject in itself; the wants and infirmities of man; the imperfection of all human enjoyments; the necessity of some rock on which the soul may rest with security; the shortness of life, and the certainty of death. By thus endeavouring to discharge the first, and, perhaps, the most

important duty towards ourselves and our God, we shall at least possess ONE principle of conduct that will prove uniform and steady ; and we shall derive ONE source of comfort, free from the alloy of human misery, nor subject to the vicissitudes of time or chance. In the exercise also of the most exalted affections of the heart, and in the discharge of the most awful, but pleasing duties, we shall experience nothing of that doubtfulness of mind against which our Lord has cautioned his disciples. While others are torn with the conflict of opposing passions, or journeying on with such anxious perplexity, as though they were " without God in the world," the christian can in the calmness of meditation, and under the pressure of calamity, pour out his soul in prayer to his Maker with confidence, security and peace. So far will he be from being harrassed with doubt or sunk into indifference, that he will offer his petitions at the throne of mercy with the warmest fervor and devotion of heart. His will not be the cold language of the

philosopher meditating on the first Cause ;
but the animated expressions of scripture.
Whenever he thinks of the Supreme Being,
he regards him as “ a God full of com-
“ passion, and mighty to save,” but yet
“ of purer eyes than to behold iniquity ;”
as the Lord of all nature, from whom
every living creature depends for life and
happiness ; as “ the great and LOFTY ONE
“ that inhabiteth eternity ;” from whose
Spirit not the boundaries of the universe
would afford a retreat, and “ in whose
“ presence there is fulness of joy.”

S E R M O N I I.

ON THE RELATIVE DUTIES OF THE
YOUNG TO THE AGED.

L E V. xix. 32.

*Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and
honour the face of the old man.*

IT is the characteristic of the christian religion, that its precepts are founded on the most enlightened reason, and strengthened by the most amiable dispositions of the heart. To the duties of the gospel many at the time of its promulgation were utterly averse; but when the striking example of those who were called “the salt of the earth” was impartially observed; when the beneficial influence of those humble virtues began to be felt,
which

which unite men together in the bands of brotherhood and love; and when the silent efficacy of our Redeemer's laws pervaded the mass of human society, in spite of persecution, bigotry and power; men could not but acknowledge the excellence of its doctrines, though few perhaps fulfilled the measure of its duties.

THE practice of christianity, indeed, requires the sacrifice of two passions, which, in a state of nature, principally share the heart of man; PRIDE and AMBITION. From these, as from their parent source, flow selfishness and fraud, cruelty and oppression in a thousand different forms. To correct these evils, the Saviour came, not with the rod of vengeance to punish mankind; but by the irresistible example of a life of holiness, that sanctified the precepts of benevolence and truth, he instilled into their hearts the mild duties of charity and humility. These were the virtues which alone could operate as effectual correctives on the depravities of man, and which he
knew

knew would, in due time, “ produce fruit
“ an hundred-fold.”

THE whole ministry of our Lord and his primitive apostles shone on the world with a splendor that might well be compared to “ the day-spring from on high:” but what we now contemplate with the greatest reverence, perhaps, was their patient labor of love, their charity, and their great humility. These were virtues to which men in general, and the Jews in particular, were strangers; though many of the precepts in the moral law of Moses might have served as a proper introduction to the humble duties of a christian. Among others we might rank the precept of the text. Reverence to age, indeed, was a duty in which they were not remarkably deficient; but, like others, they practised it on a narrow scale. It was confined chiefly to their parents. It was extended also to the prophet and the priest, while they were thought subservient to their immediate interest or happiness; but did not
restrain

restrain them from cruelty and oppression, when they reproved their vices, or pointed out the punishment due to their crimes.

LET us, therefore, consider the motives for honoring "the hoary head," as they are derived from the principles, and connected with the duties of christianity. But we must remember, it is not merely to age, that this reverence is due; but to the hoary head only "when it is found in the way of righteousness." From its very nature it must be one of the relative duties of the Young; and its obligations are founded on the genuine sentiments of the heart, on the deductions of REASON, as well as the precepts of RELIGION, and on the peculiar advantages resulting from it.

FIRST, the gospel strongly inculcates the principles of general deference and humility. "In lowliness of mind," says the apostle, "let each esteem other better than himself;" and to the exhortation of being "kindly affectioned towards our fel-

" low-

“ low-creatures,” is added the precept of
“ preferring one another in honor.”

THE Young, considered in their relation to the Aged, have many additional reasons for shewing this deference and honor ; and further, the sentiments of reverence should be accompanied with tenderness and affection. Perhaps, this is one of those duties which is derived from the instinctive feelings of the heart : the old man was honored before the reasonableness of the obligation was considered, or the benefits of it understood. From that sensibility with which the Almighty Father has impressed the human soul, men often *FEEL* before they *THINK*, and act, before they have considered their motives of action. From the same source many of the most refined pleasures of life originate. Ask the contemplative man why he delights to view the fragments of antiquity ; the hanging arch, the mutilated column, and the moss-grown tower ? Ask him why he sometimes watches the closing twilight,

wanders through the gloomy valley, or listens with peculiar pleasure to the distant murmurs of the sea? He will find it difficult, perhaps, to analyse his satisfactions, or trace them to their cause; but he will tell you that he felt and enjoyed them before he knew why, or considered wherefore.

IN the same manner, those who can contemplate the hoary head without some PREPOSSESSION of respect and tenderness, want the essential requisite of nature for performing their duty to the Aged as they ought.

BUT if they wish to seek for other motives they will be found in abundance. It is to them that the Young are to look for superior knowledge, and superior virtue. They have enjoyed the benefits of experience, and are therefore qualified to be our monitors and guide. The claims to deference arising from the distinctions of birth and fortune, are trifling and inconsiderable, when compared to these. If reverence

verence is due from one human being to another, it can never be offered with more propriety, than as the price of knowledge, from the ignorant to the wise.

THE Aged may be considered as oracles that speak to the serious and the well-disposed, with such conviction as they can nowhere find, but in their own experience. They are a sort of living chronicles, that impress the memory and imagination with all the energy of truth. The information we derive from books is often imperfect, doubtful or fallacious ; and who would not rather hear an interesting and important event related simply as it was, by one who was an eye-witness of it, than read the same in the page of the most eloquent historian ? The Aged, therefore, possess advantages which no others can possess, and we must often bow to "the hoary head" for the most useful admonitions of practical wisdom, or live in ignorance and folly.

LET the respect which is thus due from the scholar to the master be heightened and improved by sentiments of tenderness and affection ; by sympathies which it would be needless to explain, both to those who can feel them and those who cannot ; to the former explanation would be impertinent, and to the latter it would be unintelligible.

WITH this view, let us consider the Aged as having trodden the path which we have before us, and as on the confines of that eternal world “ where the wicked “ cease from troubling, and the weary be “ at rest.” Let us consider them as having husbanded and improved the talent which we, perhaps, shall squander away, and as preparing, with humble confidence, to “ enter into the joy of their Lord.” But let me repeat, that I speak not of the old, impenitent wretch who is ignorant, in spite of the benefits of experience, and vicious in imagination, when appetite is no more.

more. These observations relate only to "the hoary head" when crowned with wisdom, virtue and piety. Viewed in this light, the Aged impress us with the deepest sense of reverence and honor. They have encountered difficulties and temptations in which we, perhaps, shall be enthralled, and can point out to us the means by which they escaped. They have been exposed to trials from which our fortitude would shrink with terror, and have mortified those evil dispositions of nature, which might be preparing for us disappointment, misery and guilt.

To the hero who has retired from the field, crowned with the wreath of fame, men look up with admiration and applause; and shall we withhold our reverence from him who has fought "the good fight of christian faith," and obtained a victory over the temptations of the world? This would be strange perversion. In the estimation of reason and religion, I know not a more exalted being on earth than an aged

man, whose past life entitles him to this distinction.

To render our veneration more personal and endearing, we should consider him also as dead to those pleasures and enjoyments which we regard as our chief felicity, and laboring with those infirmities under which we also must one day sink. Beside therefore the precepts of religion and the mere arguments of reason, there are other motives arising from the sympathies of self-love and blended with the humane affections of the heart, which render it an indispensable duty for the young to “rise
“up before the hoary head, and to honor
“the face of the old man.” How all these considerations should concur to strengthen the laws of nature, and inspire children with reverence gratitude and affection for their parents, is so obvious, that to enlarge on it would be unnecessary, and foreign to the general subject.

BUT

BUT let not your relative duty to the aged be confined to simple reverence or outward respect. Let me exhort you often to frequent their company and court their conversation. The most beneficial effects might be expected from such an intercourse. It is by that exercise of our faculties, which contrast and variety afford, that we improve in knowledge and in virtue. View the man who moves in one unvaried circle of business, or of pleasure, and you will generally find, that his mind is contracted by habit, fettered with prejudice, and uninformed by experience. He is as incapable of supporting with dignity a change of situation, or a reverse of fortune, as the animals of one element are of existing in another.

IN order, therefore, to enjoy the benefits of life, and to use the bounties of the great Creator without abusing them, the prosperous should be acquainted with adversity; they that go on their way re-

joicing should know what it is to mourn ; the votary of pleasure should have his intervals of labor ; the benevolent man should enquire into the wants of the poor, and the powerful should be familiar with the distresses of those who have none to help them.

FROM the benefits that flow from such contrasted situations, and such opposite views of human life, the YOUNG, also, should frequent the company of the AGED. Their sobriety and soundness of mind might check their thoughtless and giddy conduct. Their experience and disappointments would teach them to moderate their hopes and expectations. The vanity and vexation of spirit which attended the prosecution of wandering desire, might lead them to correct the extravagance of the passions, and save them from many a pang.

IT is, I think, the grand defect of books that the representations of life which they contain are too artificial ; the precepts of
virtue

virtue are often blended with the creations of fancy, and such views of men and things are sometimes given, as existed only in the author's mind. Ambition of fame, the honors of invention and the allurements of novelty, are, indeed, too powerful not to seduce the moralist and philosopher from the paths of truth ; and the HOLY GOSPEL, perhaps, is the only book, which from its plainness, its unaffected dignity and simplicity, we can read with perfect confidence and security. Books of moral instruction, though pleasing, and often useful, are always fallacious and ineffectual. The impressions they make are faint and evanescent; and from THEIR authority we think ourselves, on every trifling occasion, entitled to appeal.

BUT when we hear the counsels of wisdom from the lips of one who speaks from experience, who relates, without vanity, or affectation, only what he himself saw, did, or suffered, we must be blind to our interest and happiness not to treasure it up

in our hearts, either as a precept for our instruction, a warning against danger, or a reproof for past errors. Why do we pay such implicit veneration to the narrative of the Evangelists? One reason is, because "they spoke what they knew, and testified what they had seen." From the same principle, though in a much less degree, deference and submission are due to the communications of the Aged.

No society, therefore, can be more beneficial to the Young, than an occasional intercourse with those, whom length of days hath taught wisdom, and whose comforts are derived chiefly from reason and reflection, instead of appetite and passion. Were there, indeed, no other motives to enforce it, the pleasure arising from variety would be sufficient. Unvaried gratification soon becomes tiresome and insipid; if, therefore, we wish to cultivate true happiness, we must diversify even the rational enjoyments of life. None but the morose would debar youth from pleasure, provided

provided it be neither vicious nor degrading; but to retire from the scenes of festivity and joy, and anticipate the benefits of experience from the admonitions of the Aged, is not only the way to enlarge the understanding and fortify the heart, but the best means of rendering the return of other pleasures innocent and delightful.

By thus furnishing the mind with various powers of enjoyment, it is prevented also from being lost in sensuality, or enslaved to the idle gratifications of vanity and pride. Taught to watch for ourselves, from the strange vicissitudes that have befallen others, we first submit to the DUTY and then enjoy the BENEFIT of thought and meditation. When the pleasures of the world are interrupted, or withdrawn, which must often be the case, we can retire without regret from what delighted the eye, or charmed the ear, and derive comforts from a purer source; comforts that are independent of others, and that accompany us in solitude and silence, in the season of calamity,

lamity, and at the hour of death. To acquire this discipline over the mind, with which so many blessings are connected, nothing can be more effectual than frequent intercourses with the Aged.

MANY young persons, I know, are ready to alledge their gravity and moroseness, their indifference to amusements, or their condemnation of pleasure, as bars to this desirable society. But consider; it is not an accession of spirits and vivacity that you want; your foolish confidence and blind credulity need not be increased; and surely the ardor of your passions and desires is already sufficiently dangerous. These require not to be inflamed, but controuled; and we wish you to frequent the company of the Aged for what you chiefly want, and THEY are particularly qualified to bestow;—habits of thought and reflection, sobriety of sentiment, the warnings of experience, and the grand duty of guarding against the temptations of the world.

BUT

BUT you must not expect at once the beauties of the spring, and the fruits of autumn; you must not be disappointed, if you do not find the wisdom of age, enlivened by the gay hopes and boundless confidence of youth; nor must you regret that the exercise of the more amiable virtues is unattended with the raptures of passion, or the endearments of sensibility. That would be as preposterous as to look for roses in December, or to expect that the setting sun should shine with the fervid splendor of noon.

BESIDE the gradual abatement of appetite and passion, the apathy which satiety or frequent repetition produces, and not to mention the many INFIRMITIES of the Aged, there are other causes to render them, what we might call, morose, suspicious and severe. They have seen and are assured of the folly and the danger which attend the pleasures of the world; they have often grieved, and, perhaps, suffered, for the baseness and depravity of men; they have

often chased the phantoms of hope, till they have vanished into air, and when other illusions supplied their place, they have grasped at happiness, perhaps, but embraced misery. Can you wonder then that prudence should sometimes teach THEM to apprehend evil, where you see nothing but good? And that their expectations should be moderate, their wishes sober, and their passions subdued?

WITH such charitable reflections, let us view those dispositions of the Aged, which may appear to us as frailties and imperfections. But as every human being is subject to sin, we should be careful in all the examples that are set before us, to avoid the evil, and imitate the good. In short, let us joyfully embrace every means in our power of improving that inestimable talent which is entrusted to our care, and by which alone we can “grow wise unto salvation.” The grand support and anchor of the soul is the revealed word of God, Jesus is our High-Priest, and the good Shepherd

Shepherd who will guide and feed us, if we hear his voice. All the assistance that we can derive from this world is but a secondary aid; yet in running the race that is set before us, where the prize is an immortality of bliss, no means of increasing our strength should be neglected. To render our calling and election sure, the exertion of all our powers is necessary. However we might be distinguished for some good qualities, we must still endeavour to acquire more. "Giving all diligence, we must
" add to our faith virtue, to virtue know-
" ledge, and to knowledge temperance, to
" temperance patience, and to patience
" godliness." The bright catalogue of christian virtues is not yet complete; "to
" godliness we must add brotherly kind-
" nefs, and to brotherly kindness charity."

LET not the young therefore rest satisfied merely with benevolent dispositions, or the shining qualities of generosity and friendship; but let these, and every other virtue, be strengthened by habits of reflection,

tion, by steady principles and the wholesome restraints of religion. As a preliminary step to obtain an object so valuable, I have endeavoured chiefly to enforce the precept of the text, by exhorting them “ To rise up before the hoary head, and “ to honor the face of the old man.” But to give the precepts of virtue and the admonitions of wisdom vigor and effect, let us at all times have recourse to that holy volume “ which was given by inspiration “ of God, and which is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction and for “ instruction in righteousness; that the “ man of God may be perfect, and through- “ ly furnished unto all good works.”

S E R M O N III.

ON THE RELATIVE DUTIES OF THE
AGED TO THE YOUNG.

PROV. xvi. 31.

*The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be
found in the way of righteousness.*

THERE are few men so depraved, or
so wholly destitute of the instinctive
principles of virtue, as not to feel some
predilection for the Aged. In their cha-
racter and condition of life there is always
sufficient to claim the most interested at-
tention. If possessed of health and chear-
fulness, some pleasing hope will dawn up-
on the mind that our days might not be
“ few

“ few and evil,” but like theirs be many, happy, or at least, serene. If sinking under calamities and laboring with disease, it will be impossible to suppress the pity that springs even from self-love, when we consider that the years, perhaps, are drawing nigh, “ in which we too shall have no pleasure.” In every point of view, therefore, we contemplate the aged with sentiments that might be profitable to us, and that are likely to make some impression on the heart. But whatever might be our sympathetic affections arising from pity to them, or consolation to ourselves, we can never consider “ the hoary head as a crown “ of glory, unless it be found in the way “ of righteousness ;” unless it be stored with that wisdom which time and reflection are hourly instilling into the mind, in order to wean us from the world, and prepare us for heaven.

HAVING therefore, in a former discourse, considered some of the relative duties of the Young to the Aged, I shall, on the present

sent occasion, point out some of the virtues which ought to adorn "the hoary head," that we may regard it as "a crown of glory."

ONE of the first things which a young person has reason to expect, and which indeed he chiefly wants, from the Aged, is INFORMATION. "They have been young" and now are old ;" they have seen life in a variety of different forms ; sometimes enlivened by hope, and sometimes harrassed by fear, or the conflict of opposing passions ; at intervals affording joy and gladness, but oftener presenting the cup of affliction. They have long sojourned in that land of discipline where all are stationed ; where many live surrounded with evils in thoughtless indifference ; and where others look forward with trembling, but unavailing anxiety, and wish to know the variable fortune of their days. But though we can neither avert the evil, nor anticipate the good which may befall us, yet we can so discipline our minds as to be able to meet

the former with becoming fortitude, and enjoy the latter with thankfulness and moderation.

To the Aged, therefore, the young have a sort of natural right to apply, as to experienced travellers that can direct their course through stormy seas, or perplexing wilds. And can they acquit themselves of negligence and folly, if it should appear that they are unable to warn them of unexpected dangers, and to point out the path that leads to safety? Surely not. Life has been of little advantage to him who derives no wisdom from its variety, and no virtue from its trials. However harmless, or negatively good such a man may be, he will be considered only as the slothful servant who hid his talent under ground. It is not required, as a DUTY, of any man, that he should make new discoveries in science, or that from length of days he should be able to investigate the works of nature, with the labor and minuteness of philosophy; but every human being that is

is endowed with reason and reflection, is required to exercise those intellectual powers, and to gather some of the fruits of that knowledge which always lie scattered before him. However the duties of life, or other circumstances peculiar to his situation, may debar him from extensive acquisitions and speculative researches, it is his duty to be PRACTICALLY wise. He is at least required to “take heed to himself, “and keep his soul diligently, lest he forget the things which his eyes have seen, “and lest they depart from his heart all “the days of his life.”

THE Aged, however, are not often incapable, or indisposed to give instruction to the young, of some kind or other; but it should be a duty with them of the highest importance to give only that which is good. Many from having lived long in the world. are so wedded and enslaved to it, that their wisdom and advice have no other object than its riches and honors, its interests or pleasures. Hence it often happens that

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their admonitions, instead of teaching "that
" wisdom which is from above, whose
" ways are ways of pleasantness and all
" whose paths are peace," tend only to
inculcate a sort of worldly prudence, and
selfish kind of knowledge, which chokes
the seed of every growing virtue, and dis-
qualifies the child of immortality for hea-
ven. The knowledge which the Aged
might acquire of the folly and weakness of
mankind, should never be employed in teach-
ing the lesson of successful fraud and op-
pression, nor should their long acquaintance
with the baseness of the world create any
indifference for virtue, or excuse for vice.
Taught by experience and directed by re-
ligion, they should impress on their minds
the awful truth that "one thing only is
" needful;" and that the favor of God can
be the reward only of a life of holiness, and
the determined pursuit of virtue. From
superior advantages they might often, in the
affairs of this world, communicate the
"wisdom of the serpent," but then it were
better not communicated at all, unless it
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can be united with the “innocence of the
“dove.”

ANOTHER moral excellence which it is the duty of the Aged to acquire, is a proper regulation of the passions. Time and repeated experience of sorrow will often accomplish, in this respect, what reason and religion have attempted in vain. From the silent progress of years, that have carried away with them the intemperate ardor of youth, many wishes and desires must have gradually subsided; the vexations of disappointment might have allayed the violence of ambition, and, on all occasions, the deceitfulness of what we call pleasure, and the imperfection of every worldly enjoyment, should beget that sobriety of mind which the discipline of life is continually forcing upon us, and which the precepts of christianity assist us to form. This should be one of the brightest ornaments in the crown of glory that belongs to the hoary head; it should produce settled habits of virtue; it should establish some de-

terminated pursuit of good ; it should shew that life has not been squandered away without improvement, but that amidst the variety of objects that excite the hopes of man, there are some that will neither deceive him, nor lead him into evil. From such a regulation of the passions would arise that complacent dignity which is the characteristic of true greatness, and that charity, and humility, that mildness and forbearance, which are the attendants of true virtue. When the Young have an opportunity of associating with a man of this description, whose wisdom commands respect, and whose years render him venerable, they ought to consider it almost as a divine benefit and blessing. Not to listen to the counsels of his lips discovers excess of folly, and not to profit from the warnings of his experience betrays incorrigible depravity.

But it unfortunately happens that, instead of this soundness and sobriety of mind, we often contemplate in the characters of
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the Aged, the child of passion and the slave of sin to the very last. Desires only vary with the changing seasons of life; and man yields himself up as it were to a succession of so many LORDS and TYRANTS, of whom the LAST are generally the WORST. To the promiscuous enjoyments and dangerous excesses of youth, succeed a confirmed passion for pleasure, or the ambitious pursuits of manhood; and these are often followed by the peevishness and discontent, the avarice and fraud of advancing years. Nothing can more effectually disqualify the Aged for doing good than the prevalence of these vices. For peevishness and discontent, for moroseness and complaint, indeed, some kind of reason may be assigned; but why avarice and rapacity should be vices more peculiar to age, than to any other season of life, is a problem in morals not easy to be resolved *.

* Vid. Cic. de Senect.

THE passion for acquiring and hoarding up wealth amounts, in certain situations, to a species of insanity ; for on what principles of reason shall we account for the conduct of one, who craves after an ideal something, which he never applies to the improvement of happiness ? whose appetite appears more sordid and eager when the season of enjoyment is past, and in proportion as the end of life approaches ? Were there, indeed, any just apprehensions of want, the helplessness and imbecillity of age might be a sufficient cause for treasuring up a competency “ to serve in time of “ need.” But when this is not the case, avarice is a vice that spreads corruption through the whole soul, and so far are the Aged, who feel its contagious influence, from being entitled to respect, that they become odious, despicable and wicked.

IT is so ordered by the wisdom of providence, that the most effectual means of good, should, by the perversion of sin, become the most dangerous instruments of evil,

evil. From this established constitution of things, as “the hoary head, when found “in the way of righteousness,” may be justly regarded as “a crown of glory,” and as exhibiting a living example of wisdom and of virtue for the honor and welfare of human nature, so there is nothing more pernicious to the morals of youth, or so likely to spread depravity through the different orders of society, as a VICIOUS OLD MAN. The object, indeed, is so truly disgusting to those who can think and act from themselves, that it is not likely to do much harm. But these are not the majority. The thoughtless, the idle and the dissolute, when they behold a wretch still wicked in inclination, though the passions have subsided; or when they observe that voluptuousness has given way to sensuality, and sensuality made room only for selfishness, rapacity and fraud, what conclusions are they likely to form? Will they not be tempted to believe that, if men can sin without any apparent temptation from nature, in spite of the benefits of experience,

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the warnings of religion and the approach of death, they shall stand excused for irregularities committed under the strong impulse of the passions, and in that season of life which renders the duties of self-denial, of all others, the most arduous and painful? Will they not be led to imagine, in the evil hour of temptation, that there is no tie to bind the human heart to reason, and that those who have lived longest seem to shew by their conduct, that religion is an imposture and virtue a cheat? But by the providence of that gracious Being, whose mercy is over all his works, human society does not abound with such characters as I have described; they are, I hope, but thinly scattered, and appear only to render others more venerable and praise-worthy. It is thus in the natural world; the stately oak seems more majestic when surrounded with brambles, and the fertile valley derives additional beauty, when contrasted with the barren heath.

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THERE are, however, a number of MINOR vices and imperfections of character, which often deprive the Aged of honor, and which prevent them from being extensively useful. There is sometimes a peevishness in their conversation, and a moroseness in their disposition, which will banish the Young from their society, and render their admonition and reproof painful and offensive. It is true, a man of charity and forbearance will make great allowance for their infirmities, their vexations and disappointments, and their disrelish for pleasure. But they should remember, that though forbearance is an amiable virtue to PRACTISE, yet it is not pleasing to be the OBJECT of it; and he who frequently throws himself on the FORBEARANCE of his fellow-creatures, will be often mortified and disappointed, and always regarded with sentiments of inferiority.

THE Aged might reasonably condemn the dangerous excesses of youth. Their intemperance, their thoughtlessness, their profligacy,

fligacy, their vanity and pride, might justly provoke the censures of experience. But if this be done with all the peevishness of passion and virulence of reproach, the severity of the lesson will counteract its precepts, and the whole will be imputed, perhaps, to vexation arising from incapacity of enjoyment, or moroseness of disposition. The wholesome admonitions of the Aged, therefore, should be delivered with becoming authority, but with that complacency which bespeaks conviction, and that mildness which assures us that the precepts of wisdom and the maxims of virtue proceed from a benevolent heart.

AGE, indeed, should be averse to violence and disorder of every kind. The tempests of the mind should be no more; neither the emotions of anger, the peevishness of discontent, nor the bitterness of wrath, should disturb the calm evening of our days. Peace and good-will to man are the grand objects of our blessed religion; and at no time surely can we cultivate them
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with greater propriety, than when we are about to quit the world for ever, and to enter into that glorious state of existence, where trouble and vexation shall be no more, and where we hope “the God of PEACE” will make us perfect. For this reason, it were to be wished, also, that the Aged would avoid that querulousness and discontent which they are so often apt to indulge. If there are evils of a peculiar nature which attend them, it should be remembered that no season of life is without its vexations. If they are destitute of some comforts, they are likewise free from many sorrows; if they experience the painful infirmities of the body, they are not doomed to suffer the anguish of the mind; for though they might have outlived the friends of their youth, and those relations which were most dear to them, yet that sensibility which once would have rendered such calamities almost insupportable is now considerably abated, and the soul is taught to “possess itself in patience.” Secured from want, therefore, and free from bodily pain,
there

there is no reason why chearfulness and contentment should not adorn “ the hoary “ head, if it be found in the way of righte- “ ousness.” But the chearfulness of the aged should not border on wantonness or levity. It should arise from the serenity of innocence and the satisfactions of virtue ; not from a thoughtless, vacant mind, or the silly affectation of juvenile spirits.

WE might, indeed, pity the man, who, after having retired from the business and the pleasures of the world, feels himself quite destitute and forlorn ; who has suffered the volume of human life to lie open before him, from year to year, without extracting any thing from its copious page, that might afford him food for reflection, or administer pleasure to him in solitude. But we must venerate him, who, in the calm retreats of age, when other gratifications are fled, can create a world of pleasure to himself ; who by indulging such pure delights as can arise only from the calm and undisturbed operations of the

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mind, is rendering himself more fit to enter into that state, where the body shall be glorified, and the soul shall live for ever in fulness of-joy.

SUCH is the character who when alone possesses stores of intellectual treasure ; and when in society, he is equally happy in instructing the ignorant, warning the Young, gratifying the curious, and comforting the afflicted. Endowed with such extensive powers of doing good, and in possession of such satisfactions, the Aged have no cause to complain, or to envy the enjoyments of the young.

BUT it often happens, indeed, that the last stage of life is rendered wretched by supernumerary woes, and that “ the day
“ of death is better than the day of one’s
“ birth.” To the pains of lingering disease, may be added sorrows that flow from various sources ; the loss of some friends, and the treachery of others ; the vice and misery of children ; the inability to do
good,

good, and the galling chain of dependence. All these are evils incident to age, and sometimes happen, too, when the mind has lost its fortitude to SUFFER, though not its power to FEEL. Under such severe trials, resignation to the divine will, and confidence in the divine mercy, are the only virtues which the Aged can practise.

LET it be their comfort that the day is far spent, and that soon the night of death will close the scene of human misery. The hand that wounds can also heal, and the wisdom that appointed suffering as the means of perfecting virtue, will most assuredly reward it. But in order to render this and every other consolation effectual, RELIGION is at all times necessary, and in such situations particularly required. At every age and in every situation of life, there are motives, in abundance, that should induce us all to "fear God and keep his commandments;" but the present occasion requires that I should point out a few only that apply, with

with singular force and propriety, to the Aged. The most obvious are the following. Those who are going down the hill of life with a quick, but silent descent, cannot deceive themselves with the vain expectation of "length of days," which often imposes on the Young, and leads them to believe, that it will be time enough for the discipline of religion to commence, when the pleasures of the world are withdrawn. The loss of strength and activity, a feeble frame and the attacks of disease, are all sufficient symptoms of decaying nature, and warnings to prepare for death. There is no time therefore to trifle away in procrastination. Soon will the trial be over, and soon will the sentence of eternity be passed.

IN the next place, the Aged are exempt from the dominion of those passions and pleasures, which are too apt to engross the attention of others, and lead them to neglect their duty. They are forced from the business and the bustle of the

world, by their infirmities, by satiety of enjoyment, or the love of ease, into retreats that are, for the most part, favorable to thought and meditation. There, when remembering the past and reflecting on the present, can they forbear thinking of the future, which is so soon to be the object of all their concern? At a time when their chief comforts must arise from the mind, can they exclude the best of all comforts, the comforts of religion? However pious and however good they might have been, they have surely cause to supplicate forgiveness, and to hope, that "their prayers and "their alms are gone up for a memorial before God." Whether their days have been marked with misery or happiness, or whether, as is generally the case, they have been chequered with both, they have equal cause to petition for the divine mercy, or to offer the song of thanksgiving and praise. On religion, therefore, the Aged must build their principal hope of happiness. That alone can furnish pleasure to the mind when every other gratification is withdrawn, and
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enliven the gloomy prospect of death with the bright hopes of immortality.

BUT let it be remembered, that the religion which thus gives confidence and peace to the good man, at the close of life, is not to be seized, in the hour of danger and alarm, as a medicine that is always at hand to quiet the conscience and to heal the mind. The religion which administers comfort in AGE must be cultivated in the days of our YOUTH. It is a mockery of devotion to serve that great and gracious God, in the moment of fear only, who requires that his service should be perfect freedom, and that it should be, at all times, our meat and drink to do his will.

BEGIN early therefore to “remember
“thy Creator in the days of thy youth.”
Let nature, that first gave the instinctive affection of piety to the wandering savage, kindle the spark of devotion in thy heart; even in childhood let it be nursed with thy growing reason; and in
F 2 youth,

youth, let it be cherished by sentiments of gratitude and adoration for the variety of blessings and enjoyments that are scattered before thee: In manhood, let the divine principle be strengthened by the remembrance of benefits received, by thankfulness for the enjoyment of competence and health, for the full expansion of the mind's faculties, and the gradual acquisition of knowledge. But should sorrow or calamity be thy lot, let the fervent prayer for mercy "to Him, "who is mighty to save," render the heavenly intercourse more interesting and needful. In old age, should it ever be our fate to reach that period of life, let all these motives combine, with others that have been already mentioned, to make us love and serve the Lord our God, with all our heart, with all our mind and with all our strength. Then may we hope that "the hoary head will prove to us a crown
"of GLORY, and that, in the day of judgment, we shall be found in the way of
"RIGHTEOUSNESS."

S E R M O N I V .

ON THE PROBABILITY OF OUR MEETING,
AND RECOGNIZING EACH OTHER
IN A FUTURE STATE.

L U K E X V I . 2 5 .

But Abraham said, Son, Remember that thou in thy life time receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.

THERE are moments in which every human being, perhaps, anxiously considers what will be the state of his soul after death; what will be the nature of his enjoyments, and what might have a share

in forming the blessedness of heaven. Over these interesting objects of enquiry, however, religion hath thrown a veil, or spoken of them in general terms. It would have been of little advantage in any point of view, to have revealed what "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard," and what the powers of the human mind could not conceive; nor was it expedient, perhaps, in this world of discipline, that faith should be lost in certainty, or that the bright prospects of hope should be bounded *.

IN the fanciful systems of Greek mythology, the pleasures of Elysium and the punishments of Tartarus are described as circumstantially as the vale of Tempe, or the fountains of Ida. In the corrupt Koran of Mahomet also, and the barbarous superstitions of Gothic nations, we find a sort of voluptuous paradise promised, and described, with all the minuteness of historical relation. But so different are some of its pleasures from that purity of enjoyment

* See Ser. XX. Vol. I. p. 468.

which a christian expects, that instead of being heavenly, they might be called “ earthly, sensual, and devilish.”

OF that tremendous scene which lies beyond the grave we are permitted to know but little. As the grand principle of action, we are taught to hope for the favor, or to fear the displeasure of God; the best, the wisest, and most powerful of all beings. And to a mind capable of reflection it is impossible, indeed, to convey a more forcible idea of happiness or misery. Beyond this, therefore, we are only favored with a few rays of divine light, that break in upon us occasionally, as we peruse the holy gospel with attention, and that serve to throw a feeble lustre on the gloomy regions of death.

BUT there are two circumstances, which nature seems to bid us hope for, which reason teaches us to expect, and which the gospel of Christ indirectly promises. These are, that a CONSCIOUSNESS of our present

state shall accompany the soul after death, and that at "the resurrection of the just," we shall recognize each other in the realms of immortality.

To the contemplation of these pleasing, but awful events, let us direct our attention; not as to a matter of idle speculation, but as to a subject that might have the most beneficial influence on our conduct, and serve to purify, to comfort and improve the heart.

THE words of the text speak to the point more fully, perhaps, than any other passage of scripture. They form a part of the well-known parable of the rich man and Lazarus; and, taken with the context, appear decisive. The relation is, that the poor, afflicted beggar died, and was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died, and was doomed to the place of torments. Here he lift up his eyes and beheld the holy patriarch afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. He not only
SAW,

SAW, but RECOLLECTED them, CALLED on them by NAME, and cried for mercy. The passage, therefore, affords us a striking instance of one human being recognizing and addressing another in the future and invisible world. This might be supposed, indeed, to imply the proof of consciousness, with regard to the concerns of this present life; but the words which follow assume it as a certain truth, and will set it in a clearer point of view. “Remember,” said Abraham, “that thou in thy life-time receivedst
“thy good things, and likewise Lazarus
“evil things.”—REMEMBER!—what a dreadful appeal to CONSCIOUSNESS was this! Doubtless he DID remember; he could not but recollect the goodness of God and the many blessings that had been showered upon him, but which he had so shamefully abused, with sorrow and confusion. He remembered his hard unfeeling heart in the midst of plenty and voluptuousness; he remembered the afflicted wretch that lay at his gate, sinking under the accumulated sufferings of hunger, poverty and disease, and
“desiring

“ desiring to be fed with the crumbs which
“ fell from his table.” All this, and more
doubtless he remembered, and the remem-
brance must have aggravated the torments
he endured.

OTHER portions of scripture might be
adduced in confirmation of what has been
advanced, but it will be more profitable,
perhaps, to consider what the light of rea-
son teaches us to expect with regard to the
subjects of our present enquiry, and what
practical improvements we might derive
from them.

AMONG the many distinguishing proper-
ties of the soul, which, while they exalt
us far above mere matter, seem to give us an
earnest of immortality, is CONSCIOUSNESS ;
or that power by which we are assured of
our existence, and capable of recognizing
our own actions. The reasons which lead
us to believe, that this attribute of our in-
tellectual nature will accompany us here-
after are various. It seems, indeed, to be
one

one of the most essential qualities of the soul; nor can we conceive how it could exist without it. What, for instance, can give it *IDENTITY*, if deprived of *CONSCIOUSNESS* by the stroke of death?

WE judge of every thing by its properties. If we take from matter figure, or extension, we can no longer have any adequate idea of it; and if we withdraw from spirit the property of *CONSCIOUSNESS*, we reduce it to mere inanity. Nor is it easy to imagine that this attribute of the soul, which seems necessary to its existence at all times, should attend us at one particular period, and not at another. Were *CONSCIOUSNESS* suspended in the soul of man, he would be virtually lost till it should be restored again; and were it to cease with regard to the past, at any particular stage of our being, and admit only the events of futurity, such a cessation would be equivalent to the production of an entirely new creature.

To

To imagine, therefore, that the chain of existence shall be broken, that there will be a chasm between this life and the next, or that the veil of eternal oblivion will be spread over the past, is to admit a supposition that seems inconsistent with the wisdom, grandeur and simplicity of the CREATOR's works.

BESIDES, we cannot conceive how a poor trembling child of dust can be a proper object of condemnation before the Almighty Father, who has no knowledge, no remembrance of what is past *. Surely, it would neither become his wisdom nor his mercy to "enter into judgment" with one who was no longer conscious of his errors, and therefore incapable of feeling the justice of his sentence. But on this head the scripture, indeed, is sufficiently clear; besides the passage of the text, we are told by our Lord himself, "that every idle word, that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof, in the day of judgment."

* See Locke on IDENTITY and DIVERSITY.

To do this, therefore, supposes such a perfect and extensive CONSCIOUSNESS, as the soul in a state of mortality cannot hope to possess. The holy apostle, also, declares, on the authority of the prophet, that “every tongue shall confess to God;” and that “every one of us shall give account of himself.” Our Saviour’s description of the last day evidently implies the same; and St. Peter, in his first general epistle, did not forget to remind the brethren, that they were to “give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead.”

FARTHER, from a belief in the sacred principle of CONSCIOUSNESS; from a conviction that the soul contains within herself the eternal repository of good and evil, we might derive many important reflections, and enforce many salutary truths. Before you suffer yourselves to be enticed to sin by the pleasures and temptations of the world, remember that the CONSCIOUSNESS of it will attend you for ever and for ever.

Much

Much iniquity might pass without reproach among men, and many are "the hidden works of darkness;" but when the vanities of this life are past, it will be impossible to stifle the voice of conscience; and though you "could take the wings of the morning, and remain in the uttermost parts of the sea," you would never escape from the knowledge of yourselves. In the busy pursuits of pleasure and of gain; when we grasp at promiscuous enjoyments, or sigh for the distinctions of power, we might review our transgressions, and remember our manifold neglects without sorrow and without shame; but when the miseries of GUILT shall prey upon the mind, without even the pleasures of SIN to divert its attention; when we look back on the horrid waste of time, in a world where the crown of immortality was to be won by vigilance and care, or lost by sloth and negligence; when we recollect with pangs of ingratitude, that teach us to despise ourselves, the mercy and the goodness of God; when

when we dwell with all the anguish of a broken heart on blessings that were once within our reach, but which are now gone for ever ; and, in addition to all this, when, like the poor wretch in the parable, we recognize, perhaps, some spirit in bliss, and see the great gulph of eternity fixed between us, then shall we learn the true value of human life ; then shall we find that “ one thing only was needful,” and that no small share of the sufferings of the wicked must flow from that CONSCIOUSNESS, which accompanies every human soul beyond “ the valley and shadow of death.”

BUT as it serves to aggravate the torments of guilt, so, perhaps, will it constitute a part of those exalted pleasures which are enjoyed by the SAINTS in heaven. It must be highly pleasing to an intellectual being of the most exalted order, to look back upon the progressive improvement he has made through a long course of ages ; to recollect by what means he was enabled to fulfil the measure of his duty, and by what

what salutary discipline he was trained to an immortality of bliss.

ANGELS of light and ministers of heaven, if not at first created what they now are, might look back on the small portion of time, in which they sojourned here, perhaps, as on the first instance of the divine bounty, which gave them capacities of happiness and virtue, and placed them in such a scene of trial as furnished them with proper opportunities of exerting their powers. The various sufferings and sorrows of this life, which mere mortals are apt to consider as the greatest evils, THEY will contemplate with calm delight. To THEIR exalted minds the remembrance of every affliction and calamity will afford them occasion to triumph for the race which they have run so successfully, and the good fight which they have fought under the Captain of their salvation. All will then appear to have worked together for good, and redound to the praise and glory of the omnipotent Creator. Then
6 will

will “ the chastening which for the present seemed not joyous but grievous, be found to yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness ;” and then will it appear, that every difficulty and distress of life was necessary to afford them an opportunity of proving their faith and shewing their love ; or of practising the important virtues of patience and resignation, constancy and truth, forbearance and humility. Even the remembrance of their frailties, in the regions of mortality, might inspire the song of adoration to the God of all mercies ; while the retrospective view of that life which HE has deigned to APPROVE, might create such satisfactions as would increase even the happiness of angels.

HAVING considered the reasons that afford us ground to believe that the soul can never be divested of its CONSCIOUSNESS, as they are derived from scripture, the nature of the soul itself, and the beneficial purposes which the subject might answer to every intellectual being, let us now proceed

to consider some of the arguments which render it extremely probable, if not certain, that we shall recognize each other in a future state.

If it be admitted that the CONSCIOUSNESS which we have been describing attends us at the day of resurrection, it is not possible to conceive, that it should not extend from actions, to persons and things ; because almost every act of virtue and of vice must have relation to others, as well as ourselves, and must be further circumscribed by time and place. The proof therefore of recognition, in a future state, seems to rest on two points, which the scripture will enable us to settle. The first is, that we shall rise from the dead with the SAME body which the soul now animates ; and the second is, that “ the spirits of just “ men made perfect” live in a state of fellowship, and communion of bliss. With regard to the first position, indeed, the light of reason will give us some ground of belief ; for it does not seem probable that

the soul, at the day of judgment, should assume any form so different as to alter the body's IDENTITY, and instantly cast off the frail tenement to which it was at first assigned, and which, in this scene of probation, had often been the instrument and cause of evil. This would be as preposterous as to expect that the grain which is deposited in the earth should produce seed different from itself. Accordingly the holy apostle, using the same illustration, observes that "God giveth to every seed his own body;" and after having added other analogical proofs, declares, that "so also is the resurrection of the dead." But the parable from which the text is taken is expressly to the purpose; for had Lazarus assumed a NEW body (by NEW I only mean different in exterior form, however glorified and pure in other respects) the rich man could not possibly have recognized him: And our Saviour, you might remember, after his resurrection, appeared to his disciples three times, according to St. John, in his usual form,

and in such a manner, that they immediately “knew it was their Lord.”

BUT though it appears from the scripture that the bodies of men shall be the SAME, or properly THEIR OWN, at the resurrection, yet it does not follow that they will not be changed into a form much more glorious immediately after the last judgment. St. Paul, indeed, may be thought to speak expressly of this change. Nor is this sameness or identity of the body necessary to complete the proof of RECOGNITION: for if it be admitted that every human being carries his CONSCIOUSNESS of this present life into a future state; we cannot believe that two or more “just men” “made perfect” who lived together here, and who still possess a distinct consciousness of the same facts, a participation of the same cares, the same pleasures, hopes and fears, should be deprived of the power of communicating their knowledge; and therefore RECOGNITION must take place.

WITH

WITH regard to the subject of spirits in blifs living in a state of COMMUNION and FELLOWSHIP, we cannot well entertain a DOUBT. If the mutual interchange of sentiments and communication of comforts, forms one of the chief pleasures of human life, we might be assured that it will be enjoyed in a much higher degree, in the world that is to come. The language of divine inspiration whenever the subject is noticed gives us this assurance. The angels of heaven are not represented as solitary beings, elevated so very far above all human conception as to derive their joys and satisfactions merely from themselves, and as standing in no need of communicative pleasure; but whenever they are mentioned, they are spoken of in such terms as to give us an idea of society, and the mutual participation of blifs. Hence the inspired writers use the expressions of “the CITY of the living God,” “the general ASSEMBLY and CHURCH of the first-born;” “the HOST of heaven;” and the “whole FAMILY in heaven.” In another

part the pious, after death, are represented as "no more strangers, but FELLOW-CITIZENS with the saints, and of THE HOUSEHOLD of God."

BUT the favored apostle, who was indulged perhaps with a larger portion of knowledge respecting the invisible world than his brethen, has described to us, with all the majesty and sublimity that language is capable of, the mansions of the blessed, and the employment of those that dwell therein. "I beheld," says the inspired writer, "and lo, a great multitude which no man could number, of all nations and kindreds, and people and tongues, stood before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands, and cried with a loud voice saying, Salvation to our God, which sitteth upon the throne and unto the Lamb. And all the angels stood round about the throne, and fell on their faces and worshipped God, saying, Blessing
" and

“ and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving
“ and honor, and power and might be un-
“ to our God for ever and ever. Amen.”

IN the enjoyment of these exalted pleasures; occupied in singing hymns of gratitude and praise to the Almighty Father, in those realms of immortality and joy, where “ God
“ wipes away all tears from their eyes;
“ where there is no more death, neither
“ sorrow, nor crying, neither any more
“ pain;” we might imagine that this world and all its concerns would not be worth a moment’s notice: but that would be to judge ignorantly. In forming our opinion of the capacities, with which superior beings are endowed, we should be careful not to fetter our sentiments by any consideration that might arise from the experience of our own limited powers. We cannot well attend to more than one object at a time. Some predominant passion is often sufficient to engross the whole soul; and the trifle of the moment has power to banish every other concern from the mind.

But it is not so with celestial spirits. They approach nearer to the Almighty Father, whose wisdom can penetrate all nature, and whose spirit can, at the same time, extend to the depths of hell and fill the regions of light.

BESIDES, let us not think too lightly of that race of beings, who were formed after the likeness of God ; who are the appointed heirs of immortality, and for whose salvation a Saviour died. Our blessed Lord proves, from a single passage, that the saints in heaven ARE interested in the affairs of men, when he asserts that “ there “ is joy in the presence of the angels of “ God over one sinner that repenteth.” Indeed it is neither agreeable to nature, nor consistent with perfect benevolence, to suppose that they should be indifferent to the conduct of beings, who are now sojourning in that vale of darkness which they themselves perhaps once trod, and who by walking in their footsteps will
at

at length arrive at the same mansions of blifs.

FROM the consideration therefore of the soul's consciousness, the body's identity with regard to form, in the day of resurrection, the communion of angels and their concern for the welfare of man, it is almost demonstrable that a RECOGNITION of each other will take place, in a future state, and that the remembrance of what is past, will form no inconsiderable portion either of our happiness or misery.

BESIDES, it is a persuasion that seems to spring from the genuine wishes and emotions of the heart. It has found its way into almost every religious system, and the mythology of the Greeks is full of it. Who, indeed, that is torn from those they love, and on whom all their worldly comfort depends, does not shrink from the gloomy thought that they are no where and under no form of existence to be found; that their very being is destroyed, or at least
lost

lost to them for ever ! Who, on the contrary, can forbear to form the pleasing expectation, that they yet shall meet again in those realms of joy, where death and sorrow shall no more prevail ! Nor can it be supposed that a good and gracious God would kindle in our bosoms a wish thus pious, tender, and consoling without fulfilling it. He that is wont to give us more than either we desire or deserve, could never create a benevolent affection without a view to gratify it, either in this world or the next, and our benevolent Redeemer leaves us no room to doubt that they who only “ hunger and thirst after righteousness shall “ be filled.”

THIS belief is always a support to our virtue, and oftentimes necessary to keep us from sinking under the pressure of calamity. Without it we might in some measure be said “ to sorrow without hope,” even for those “ that depart in the Lord :” for however glorious and inconceivable the bliss of heaven might be, yet the mind from its
natural

natural infirmity, requires something to rely on in a state of affliction, that might promise the peculiar comfort for which it grieves, and of which it can form some adequate conception. Hence, it is found perhaps almost universally, that when sorrow arises from the loss of those that are dear to us, we fly to this peculiar consolation, which the God of all mercies has given to us, and readily admit THAT as one of the blessings of IMMORTALITY, of which we have had some earnest HERE.

You, therefore, who have eaten the bread of affliction, and drunk of the cup of adversity; you who bewail, with tears of sorrow, the loss of a child's endearments, a friend's affection, or a parent's care, "learn
" to possess your souls in patience." The time is but short, soon will the race of life be over, and brighter prospects will open before you. Grieve not that the ties of affection are broken, and that the bands of kindred are dissolved. Soon will you enter into relationships more glorious and
more

more lasting, in “ the HOUSHOLD of God,
“ and the FAMILY of heaven.”

If the society of some that are now no more contributed to your happiness in this world, think how much it will be exalted and increased in a state of bliss, where the body shall be spiritual, and the mind exempt from the many infirmities that render this life a painful scene of trial, misery and death. Nor let us suppose that the weakness of human passions can there find any place, or that the vexations of our present state will at all interrupt our future happiness. The little dissensions that might have happened between the best of mortals, while on earth, will there be no more remembered than is the shadow of a cloud which passeth over the surface of the earth; and as for such gross and earthly passions as envy, pride, jealousy and selfishness, they will only be considered as so many evils that are past, and as demons that infest other regions.

WOULD

WOULD you, then, realize the bright hopes which reason and revelation have set before you? and would you recognize those in heaven, who formed the chief part of your happiness while on earth? RELIGION is the only handmaid that can guide you to them. If, indeed, you have been so unfortunate as to share your pleasures with the wicked, you must expect that they will prove your shame, instead of your glory: But if you have divided your hearts with the pious, the virtuous and the good, you need not be told, that in order to join them, you must walk in their paths.

IN thus pressing on towards the prize of the high calling of Christ Jesus, let us lose no time; the night of death is closing around us; no sooner, therefore, should the hour of vigilance be past, than the season of prayer should return. If we suffer life to glide away without attending to its duties, supported only by romantic hopes of future bliss, which are neither founded on the promises of religion, nor our own deserts, we

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shall

shall wofully deceive ourselves. In the day of judgment, perhaps, instead of meeting those with whom we expected to rejoice in the realms of immortality, we might find ourselves separated for ever from them by that dreadful gulph which never can be passed. What is still worse, excluded from the presence and cut off from the favor of that all-gracious Being, "with whom only there is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore."

S E R M O N V.

ON THE UNION OF GODLINESS WITH
CONTENTMENT.

I TIM. vi. 6.

Godliness with contentment is great gain.

THE eloquence of the great apostle of the Gentiles is distinguished by almost every variety of excellence. In his epistles to Timothy he is, for the most part, grave and sententious. His admonitions are admirably calculated to strengthen the mind, and to form the faithful minister of Christ; every precept seems adapted to the particular situation of the church at that time, and the whole is blended with such

such sincerity of affection, and enforced by such exalted satisfactions arising from his own conduct, though he was then a prisoner at Rome, as to render it highly interesting and impressive.

IF we consider his interview with the brethren, as recorded in the Acts, when he told them "they should see his face no more;" when he reviewed his past ministry and gave them his last instructions, it will be impossible to find any thing, under similar circumstances, more truly pathetic. When he harangued the people from the stairs of the castle at Jerusalem, when he pleaded his cause before the Roman governors and the Jewish king, we behold in him the finished orator; possessed of all the winning graces of eloquence, and all the advantages of truth. Notwithstanding the modest account he gives of himself, his manner must have been wonderfully striking and persuasive; and of the force of his arguments we can have no stronger proof, than that they made Felix tremble,

tremble, and Agrippa exclaim, " Almost
" thou persuadest me to be a Christian."

FROM his epistles a judicious critic may easily select the most perfect examples of the pathetic and sublime. His style always possesses energy, though it may sometimes be deficient in perspicuity and ease. His was the quick and penetrating mind that could dart through the regions of intellect, and see remote objects without following a long chain of intermediate ideas; his was the sensibility that could give to mental combinations the powerful interest of the passions; and his was the commanding eloquence, that equally convinced the understanding, and subdued the heart.

HENCE, from the natural fervor of his mind and the zeal of his devotion, not to mention other causes, he is sometimes unintelligible to the reader of the present day; and indeed the apostle Peter was led to remark, that in his epistles " are some things

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" hard

“hard to be understood.” The moral reflections and religious precepts, which are scattered through his writings, but which are generally found towards the end of his compositions, bespeak a mind enlarged by experience, softened by calamity, and fraught with that divine wisdom which is from above. Though short, they are in general sufficiently clear; but so wonderfully comprehensive, that a considerable degree of attention is requisite to discover their full force. To the practical knowledge and fervent piety of an apostle, St. Paul, indeed, often unites the deep researches and subtil distinctions of the philosopher. The passage in the text is an instance of this. He knew that there was a kind of Godliness without Contentment, and had often seen a species of Contentment without Godliness. The distinction was wise and accurate, and I shall attempt to prove that the union of them only produces that perfection of character, which might indeed be considered as “the GREATEST gain.”

THOSE

THOSE who have mixed much in human society must have seen many persons, who in some sense may think themselves godly, without enjoying any of that peace and serenity of mind which should flow from religion. They may believe the truths of christianity, and be regular in their devotions ; but neither the hope of immortality can secure them from petty vexations, nor the exercise of prayer to the Supreme Being, at all times, quiet the heart. Some craving desire, or some “ aching void,” may make them wretched, perhaps, though they dare not murmur, and produce a stillness that apparently resembles PEACE ; but in the same manner, and in no greater degree, than DEATH does SLEEP. This, therefore, is Godliness without Contentment.

IT is in vain that reason acquiesces if the heart rebels, and in vain has the Saviour of the world told us to “ lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven,” while the soul is yet chained to earth and enslaved to the pleasures of the world. That piety will be of little avail to us

which gives no support in the moment of temptation and administers no comfort in the hour of sorrow. Whenever there is a struggle between duty and passion, religion, instead of being the source of happiness, is the instrument of misery. We should be "filled with all joy and peace in believing;" we should hunger and thirst after righteousness, and the chearful performance of duty should at all times constitute our greatest happiness.

THOUGH, therefore, you may so far govern your heart as to prevent its wishes and desires from injuring others; though the desolated hope of happiness may die away in silence, and the pursuits of pleasure lead only to the anguish of disappointment, yet that sorrowful spirit which is often the consequence of suffering, will as effectually prevent the union of Godliness with Contentment as any other cause. It is not the man who, in the midst of worldly vexations, flies for refuge to the cloyster or the cell, that worships the great Creator, "in the beauty of holiness." He only makes
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a sacrifice to misery, he presents no acceptable offering to God, and his religion somewhat resembles the ministry of those wretched men, who as the great apostle observed, in his sagacious delineation of the human heart, “preached Christ of “envy and strife.”

UNLESS, indeed, the exercise of piety and obedience to the divine laws can be said to “fill our hearts with food and “gladness,” it is impossible that the will of the all-gracious Father should be fulfilled, in revealing the dispensations of his providence to man. Yet let not the sense of our infirmities, nor the wish for unattainable perfection abridge the power that we have of advancing in the scale of christian virtues. We cannot hope to enjoy the serene delight and uninterrupted peace of angels ; we are not disembodied spirits ; if we were, this would be no scene of trial for us, or school of discipline ; but we are “to work the will of Him that sent us.” It is his determination that virtue should be

“attained and made perfect by suffering,” and that the fruit of righteousness should, at length, be peace; but the fruit cannot precede the blossom, and the growth of every christian grace, like the natural progress of vegetation, must be regular and successive. Whatever calamities may befall us, therefore, we should so take heed unto ourselves as not to suffer them to frustrate the grand object of our existence, and destroy the ultimate hope of bliss. Like the most exalted of men, “we may be perplexed and troubled on every side, but we should endeavour like him not to despair; we might be persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.”

BUT there are some who think themselves godly and yet can have no contentment for reasons less excusable than any I have yet mentioned. They are slaves to passions farther removed from virtue, and more sordid in their gratification. Instead of following the exercise of some honest calling,

calling, with chearfulness, and regulating their intercourse with the world, as men of business, by the virtues of integrity and justice; they are for ever on the watch to take some advantage of the ignorant or the weak. Instead of offering praise and thanksgiving at the throne of grace for blessings already received, they are calling on heaven, perhaps, to prosper the schemes of worldly ambition, or envying their neighbour who ranks above them. All the satisfaction that they enjoy arises from the success of some project of business, or scheme of pleasure, and their greatest misery would spring from its disappointment.

AND yet men of this description will often assume the form of godliness; they will not neglect the hour of public worship, though they bring into the presence of the Almighty, minds that are continually preyed upon by pride or ambition, avarice or envy. These are all passions so hostile to virtue and religion, that they who can indulge them, "may look for

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"peace,"

“ peace,” when the days of vanity are past, like the rebellious Jews of old, but we may tell them, in the language of the prophet, that “ no good will come.” They may alternately experience the riotous joys of prosperity, the painful mortifications of a proud spirit and the miseries of disappointment ; but that Contentment which is the ornament of Godliness will never be their lot.

HOWEVER pure our tenets may be, and however strictly we may perform the external duties of piety, it will avail us nothing, unless we are in some measure prepared to sacrifice the world, and to forego present gratifications in order to prepare ourselves for a blessed immortality. Without this there can be no peace ; every temptation may enthral us, and every trifling evil will make us wretched.

BUT though we often find the profession of Godliness without Contentment, yet a sort of Contentment without Godliness is perhaps more common.

IT

IT is the imperfection of language, arising not so much from the ignorance, as the depravity of man, that the same word is sometimes received in a good, sometimes a bad sense, and at other times appears in a questionable shape. The word PRIDE may serve as an illustration of this remark; and CONTENTMENT is either a virtue or not, according to the principles on which it is founded, and the peculiar circumstances in which we discover it. There is, indeed, something so pleasing in the idea of Contentment; something that excludes the envy and malevolence of competition, something that connects itself with our self-love, that bespeaks an inoffensive tranquillity in the person who possesses it, and that assures peace to ourselves, as far as the sphere of its influence extends, that the world is apt to consider it in the most favorable point of view; but the world is often satisfied with the mere name of virtue, instead of the reality, and he who wishes neither to deceive himself nor others, must

must form his sentiments on higher authority. He, therefore, will expect to find Contentment invariably associated with Godliness; he is taught to unite it with goodwill to man and gratitude to heaven.

BUT look abroad into the world, and you will see men who seem to live only to pamper the body with luxury, and the mind with pleasure. Providence perhaps has scattered plenty around them; like the rich man in the gospel they can say to their souls, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink and be merry." This they can do, and though destitute of every other virtue, they will claim some merit for that of Contentment. The cries of hunger and oppression reach not their ears, nor disturb their peace, such as it is. They feel nothing of the regret which often attends the strong benevolence of a virtuous heart, without the power to gratify it, and are equally free from the danger of being betrayed into sorrow by friendship, or by pity. The indulgence of sensuality,

ſenſuality, perhaps, they will call liberal enjoyment of the divine bounty, and that torpid ſloth of mind which ſatiety produces, might be dignified by others with the name of CONTENTMENT.

BUT can you diſcover any merit in Contentment under ſuch circumſtances? Does it partake of that peace, which the Saviour of the world bequeathed to his beloved diſciples, on his departure from the world? or does it in the leaſt reſemble that Contentment which ſhould accompany Godlineſs? No; it is only the quieſcent ſatisfaction of an animal that is doomed to ſleep, to feed and die, without the taſk of labor.

BUT theſe vices of indulgence are not confined to the higher orders of the community. The man who ought to ſhelter thoſe from want, who have a right to look up to him for protection, will be contented to ſacrifice every thing to the gratification of his own deſires. He whoſe
labor

labor scarcely procures the scanty pittance that is sufficient for food and raiment, will often squander it away in the sensual pleasures, to which he is prone, instead of carrying it home, and sharing it with delight, in feeding the hungry and clothing the naked.

ANOTHER species of Contentment, which is seldom found with Godliness, is that which proceeds from an indolent and careless mind, from selfishness and insensibility. There are many who, if they are supplied with the necessaries and conveniencies of life, are exempt from every other care, till the very moment in which some evident and approaching calamity rouses them from their lethargy. Were this to proceed from confidence in the divine wisdom and mercy, after having endeavoured, as much as possible, to secure their own peace; or were it the result of a rational conviction of that heavenly truth which tells us that "sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof," it would be a virtue of some importance; but it is the effect

effect of causes that are widely different. It proceeds from such indolence and thoughtlessness of mind as quite disqualifies a human being for passing through a scene of trial. They think not of the danger that requires vigilance, the calamity that might call for fortitude, or the temptation that might produce a struggle. Placed in the midst of the active scenes of life, they seem to bear no part in them, but look on, as idle spectators, without hope and without fear, and therefore they are contented, while others guard them; but should this support ever be withdrawn, they are left as weak as infants, and almost as helpless.

THE contentment of others may be ascribed to selfishness. I fear there is a numerous class of men, who seldom find their peace annoyed, because they feel for none but themselves. The fashion of the world and the mere forms of civility will often teach them expressions of pity and condolence, when they are no more interested in the fate of a fellow-creature, than in the

direction of a cloud that passes before the wind. "If a brother or a sister be naked, "and destitute of daily food," such a one can say to them, in the language of the apostle, "depart in peace, be ye warmed "and be ye filled," without feeling the least compunction of nature, "and without giving them those things which are "needful for the body." Should life, therefore, abound with no calamities that abridge him of his few solitary, selfish pleasures, and no trials of patience arising from the afflictions of the body, he may rank among those who possess Contentment, but not the Contentment which St. Paul speaks of.

So likewise the man who is constitutionally insensible, or who has hardened himself through the deceitfulness of sin, may enjoy a sort of complacency, which might be harmless enough, but which has no pretensions to the distinction of virtue. We cannot, however, censure the Contentment of one who wants a heart to feel for himself as well as others; and insensibility we should remember

remember is no crime. Devoid of affectation and hypocrisy, we might at all times treat it with some indulgence, if not respect. It is proper only to observe, that on such a mere negative quality, that Contentment is not to be founded, which we expect to see united with Godliness.

THAT must be the fruit of much discipline and long experience. But you must not understand from this that it is a virtue peculiar to the aged; since many undergo more trials, and enjoy the benefits of more reflection, in a few years, than others do in the course of a long life. If you would possess the calm delights, therefore, of this heavenly virtue, you must first learn to THINK, and then determine to ACT. No intellectual excellence can be obtained without this necessary fortitude. The virtue of which I have been speaking is liable to be grossly misunderstood. Early in life, you may experience the satisfactions of youth, the delights of fancy and the momentary sensations of pleasure; but these resemble Contentment

tentment only as the sudden blaze resembles the lustre of the day. Godly Contentment should be equally remote from those giddy satisfactions in which the soul acquiesces with pleasure, the still-life of indolence, or insensibility, the disorder of turbulent passions, or a mind liable to be harrassed by every trifling evil. It should not arise merely from gratification, nor altogether from a heart that has been subdued to the peace of insensibility by repeated sorrows. It should not be that stoical disposition of soul, which might lead us to believe, that we are beyond the reach of suffering ourselves, nor should it resemble that dead calmness which renders us incapable of feeling for others: but it should proceed chiefly from an unbounded confidence in the divine mercy and goodness. That independent dignity of soul which excludes all superfluous wants, and that complacency of spirit which is not to be ruffled by trifling vexations, can arise only from our relation to the Most High; this is the grand principle of godly Contentment ;

ment; and to render it a habit of the soul it must be fixed by the experience of idle sorrows that are past, by reflections on the shortness of the race that is set before us, and the insignificance of this world, and all its concerns, when put in competition with the blessings of immortality. But to acquire Contentment it is not necessary that the passions should be destroyed by disappointment, or calamity; they should only be subdued to reason. They should, if possible, retain their energy, without the danger of annoying the happiness of others, or disturbing our own; and though they might often lead us into scenes of woe, yet the pleasure of suffering should more than compensate for the pain.

SUCH is the Contentment which, when united with Godliness, may be truly said "to be great gain." The union of these excellencies constitutes the highest character that a human being can sustain. Godliness without Contentment is wretchedly imperfect; and Contentment without

Godliness partakes more of the nature of vice than virtue. It is only when we possess both, that we enjoy the full benefit of either. Then our devotion will neither be clouded with the gloom and austerity of the cloyster, nor be debased with the follies of superstition. It will not be interrupted by wishes less holy and desires less pure, that may disquiet the heart, when the lips are formed to prayer, nor will our service to God be considered as an irksome duty, but as our highest privilege, our pleasure and delight. While thousands are chasing the phantoms of imagination, and crying, in the peevishness of disappointment, "who will shew us any good?" we might feel comfort that never will forsake us in the humble petition, "Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us."

THE advantages of Godliness with Contentment are many also if considered with regard to this world. It is the best foundation of honor and reputation among men;

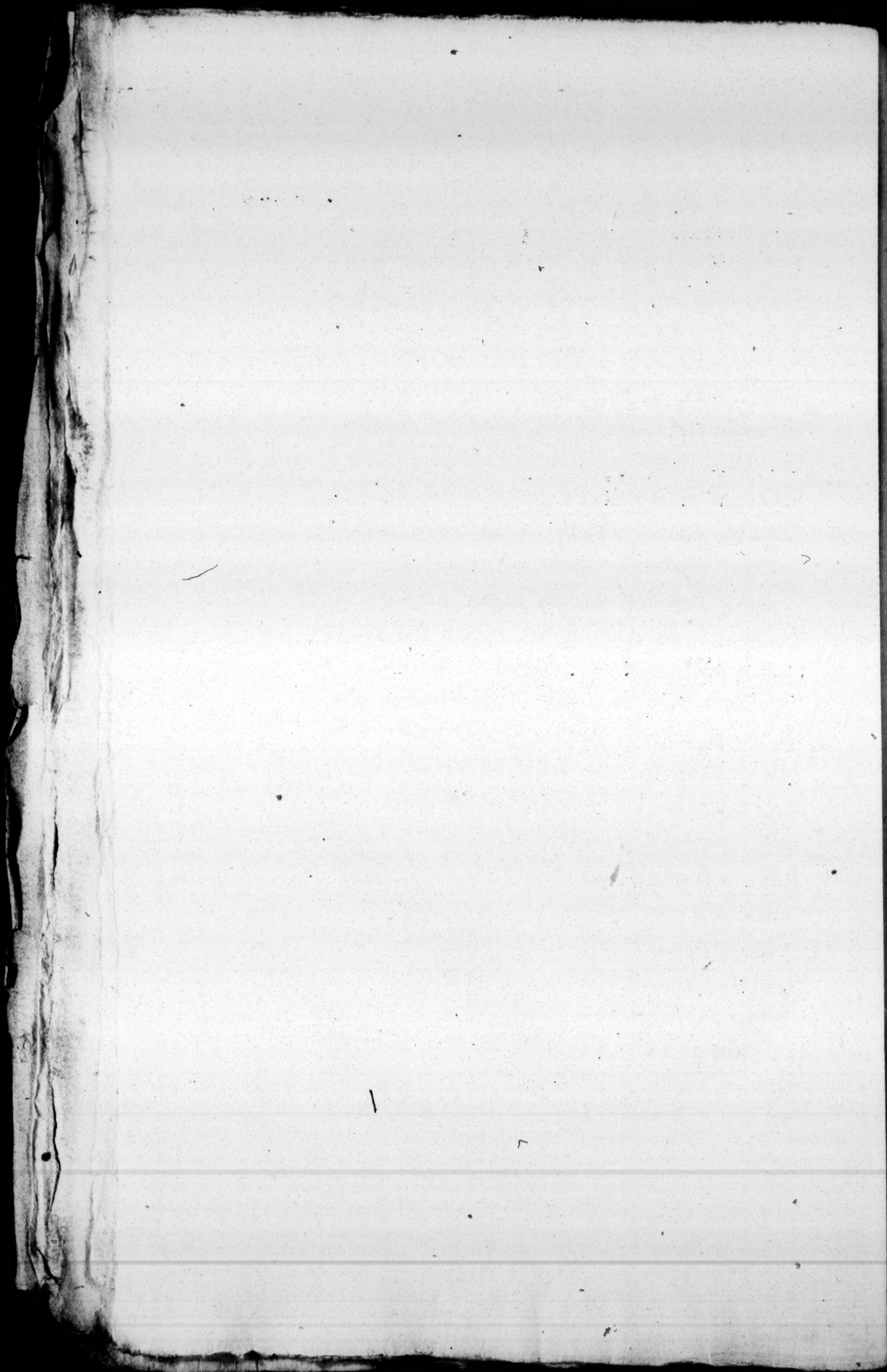
it secures us from numberless calamities, and greatly adds to the scanty portion of human comforts; it enables us to be extensively useful, and admirably qualifies us for enforcing the precepts of true wisdom by a suitable example. It is the best security against temptation, the strongest support of virtue, and a pledge of the purest felicity. Besides, with it are connected all the virtues which form the chief ornaments in the christian character; steadiness of conduct, charity, humility, temperance, resignation, benevolence and peace. It is not possible, indeed, but that those laws and precepts which are delivered from the Most High, should tend to the happiness and perfection of man. Let your own reason, therefore, the vanity of worldly gratifications, and the experience of the evil and disorder arising from a discontented mind, teach you to seek for peace in the practice of Godliness.

LIFE is passing away with silent celerity, and if your choice be not already made, it

is time to fix on some determined pursuit of good. But little can be done while the heart is fluctuating between good and evil; and that Godliness will scarcely be attended with Contentment, which comes not till the close of life, when past enjoyments appear insipid, and every other comfort is withdrawn.

WHATEVER gratifications may now spring from pleasure, from vanity or pride, the time is fast approaching when reflection will be forced on the mind; when the humble hope of having pleased the Almighty Father, “in whose hands are the “issues of life and death,” will absorb all others, and when the fear of having incurred his displeasure, will banish the sense of every other calamity. To meet this tremendous scene with becoming fortitude, let us endeavour to possess the grand requisite—“Godliness with Contentment.” It is this will shew that we have lived satisfied under the dispensations of the divine providence, and made it our PLEASURE as well

well as our DUTY to do the will of God. It is this will enable us to guard against the evils of our own bosoms, and the temptations that might assail us from the world. It is this will furnish us with the amplest means of happiness, and prove the best passport from time to eternity; for considering it as forming no inconsiderable portion of the strength of our salvation, whatever calamities may befall us, "we cannot but live by hope," and die in peace. Well, therefore, might the holy apostle observe, that "Godliness with Contentment is great gain;" and well might we learn to relinquish all other gain, that would interrupt the satisfactions of piety, and endanger the blessedness of heaven.



S E R M O N VI.

ON FORBEARANCE.

E P H E S. iv. 2.

Forbearing one another in love.

VARIOUS are the duties which spring from the two grand principles of christian CHARITY, and christian HUMILITY. To the former belong the kindred qualities of pity and forgiveness; to the latter are allied the modest virtues of gentleness and peace. From the union of these, among other perfections of character, arises the duty recommended in the text. Derived from such principles it cannot be but ami-

able, and it must be important. Other endowments of the mind, perhaps, may be more splendid and flattering to human pride; better calculated to "shine before men," and to catch their admiration; but if we attend to our own comforts, and the happiness of those with whom we live, we shall find none more requisite and none more effectual than christian forbearance.

VIRTUES of a higher cast, break forth in their full splendor only on some rare emergence; but in this world of ignorance and error, of weakness and depravity, who has not daily cause to practise Forbearance? Yet necessary as it appears to be, and benevolent as the principles are from which it springs, it does not seem adapted to acquire the honor of the world, or to gratify the vanity of the human heart. It is, for the most part, a silent, passive virtue, that blesses as it were unseen, like "the dew that falls by night." It is "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit" in its progress through the thorny path of life,
some-

sometimes exhorting with all kindness, sometimes wounded with injuries, and often subdued to compassion.

LET me entreat you, therefore, to cultivate a virtue of such intrinsic excellence, which is attended with many reciprocal comforts, and which, if duly practised, affords the most convincing proof of a truly christian disposition. If you are at a loss for sufficient motives to practise what the Saviour of the world and his great apostle have enjoined, first examine your own hearts; and that forbearance which you need yourselves, learn to extend to others. Perhaps, you might find nothing that calls upon your neighbour, or your friend, for the exercise of this mild virtue. Should this be the case, be assured that pride and blindness of heart are among the first evils that annoy the peace and need the forbearance of your fellow-creatures. Though, therefore, you might not learn the lesson of christian love from examining into your own frailties, it is by no means a proof of innocence,
but

but rather a demonstration that you are nearly allied to that boasting Pharisee, who thanked God that he was not as other men are.

IN order to guard against such strong delusions of self-love, do not confine your attention to such outward acts of violence and disorder, as betray a mind subject to no discipline, or wholly depraved; because from these, perhaps, you may be in a great measure free; but examine into the infirmities of temper; consider the numberless petty provocations and distresses that you might occasion to others from vanity and pride, or mere self-indulgence; search those dark recesses of the heart into which some are afraid, and many are ashamed to look. There you will find, if you are not more than mortal, errors in abundance. Though the world cannot prove you guilty of lawless outrage or enormous crimes; yet have you never fostered in your bosoms such desires, as wanted only opportunity to be productive of both? Though you might not have oppressed your dependent, or your friend under misfortune, by any cruel exercise

exercise of power, yet have you at no time been inattentive to their ease and comfort? You cannot be charged with injustice, perhaps, but say, have you never withheld the gift of christian charity, nor given those who looked up to you for pity and protection unnecessary pain? But though you might even think that you stand clear of these particulars, have you nothing to answer for to yourselves and to the God of heaven, for indolence and neglect of duty, for wilful transgression, and voluntary error? These are charges to which we must all, in some measure, plead guilty, however the blindness of self-love might prevent us from acknowledging others. Yet by the goodness and FORBEARANCE of God, we are still furnished with opportunities of amendment; still the bounties of nature are spread before us, and the means of reconciliation are still within our power. Surely this consideration alone should make us kind and forbearing towards our fellow-creatures. Hard and unfeeling must be the heart of that man, who can meditate
on

on the mercies of God, without being softened and improved. Where, indeed, are we to look for excellence but in the example of Him, who is the source of all wisdom and perfection; and where shall we learn the meek lesson of forbearance, if not from the reflection that on the existence of this gracious principle in the Supreme Being, all our hopes of eternal salvation must depend?

IN cultivating this important duty, let us advert also to the wants, the frailties and imperfections of our fellow-creatures. In this world of discipline, there must necessarily be a mixture of good and evil. "It is impossible but that offences will come;" and therefore frequent occasions will occur for the exercise of christian patience: sometimes, indeed, our indignation might be justly provoked, but oftener we shall have cause for pity and forbearance. It is the distinguishing characteristics of true charity to suffer long "and to be kind;" not to be easily provoked;

provoked ; to think no evil ; to rejoice not in iniquity, but “ to rejoice in the truth.” And various are the reasons that urge us to the practice of these distinct branches of Christian duty in our intercourse with the world. Much of the error that offends us might arise from unavoidable ignorance, and many vices are more likely to be reformed by the gentle correctives of christian charity, than the severe reproaches of anger, or the scornful rebukes of pride. Why did the Saviour of mankind enter the habitations of publicans and sinners so often ? Why did he exhort them with patient gentleness and mild forbearance ? Because he considered that they who are whole need not a physician, but they who are sick. He knew how large a portion of the human race are bred in ignorance, and how many are enslaved to prejudice and vice, before they are sensible of the excellence of virtue or of truth. He knew how many need only the warning voice of divine love to make them shrink from danger ; and how many that are considered by men as mere outcasts of society,

society, might be converted from the error of their way, and restored to the bosom of their God.

AND were we as much disposed to imitate, as we are to admire, the example of our blessed Lord, we also should find daily cause to practise the forbearances of christian love. We cannot too often remember that "there is none that doeth good," with uninterrupted constancy, "no not one;" and the lesson of divine benevolence which the Son of God taught for the redemption of man, we should learn not only from motives of duty, but from social and sympathetic affections. Even self-love would enforce the precept which religion enjoins. We are exhorted to forgive, that we might be forgiven. All have their imperfections, and there are few, (perhaps none,) who possess not some good qualities. But one great cause of error in judgment with us is, that we generally esteem no virtues, but those which we ourselves might possess, and are only disposed to censure with

with severity the vices and follies that are practised by others. Thus, while we are blind to our own ERRORS, we are blind also to our neighbour's VIRTUES.

THE great duty of forbearance would teach us to correct this evil disposition. It would lead us to enquire, before we proceeded to uncharitable censure, whether the objects of our condemnation, though subject to many imperfections, might not on the whole be acceptable in the sight of God; whether they do not possess virtues to which we are strangers, though they might plead guilty to sins from which we are free; and whether their trials might not have been more severe, their opportunities of improvement less frequent, and their nature more prone to the temptations of passion. Forbearance, therefore, is essentially requisite to teach us how to appreciate the character of a neighbour, and the value of a friend. Without forbearance, we are often in danger of being misled by the prejudices of others, as well as our own.

own. We might injure the innocent, oppress the wretched, and turn from the complaints of poverty, and all for want of cultivating that heavenly virtue which would teach us “to FORBEAR one another “in love.”

THE practice of Forbearance is as necessary to our happiness as it is to our duty. Could you ever hope to enjoy the blessings of Contentment, or the peace of Godliness, if every act of folly and indiscretion were to provoke your rage, or excite your enmity? No; the mind would be continually irritated with selfish miseries and the idle vexations of pride. The life of man abounds with petty evils. Wherever he turns, he finds them thickly scattered in his way. They are the tares that spring up among his wheat, and cannot be separated till the harvest comes: but there are also a number of minor comforts, flowing from a thousand different sources; and these taken together generally form the sum of human happiness and human misery. The
5 latter

latter we might greatly improve, under the blessing of God and the discipline of his laws ; and the former we might, in a great measure, repel with the weapons of christian Fortitude, or suffer them hourly to invade our peace, and lead us, at length, the willing slaves of sin, into wretchedness and guilt.

BUT from negligence and folly many seem foolishly to trifle with their fate. They think not of guarding against sorrow, till the storm of misery threatens them with destruction ; and though surrounded with comforts, they idly repine for enjoyment, till some wonderful event of providence shall give them all that their soul desires. For circumstances that seldom occur, and situations that may never fall to their lot, they are sometimes busy, perhaps, in preparing themselves ; but to the varied scene of good and evil that daily passes before them, they are strangely inattentive. Have you not sometimes grieved to see, in the common occurrences of domestic life,

the blessings of health and prosperity pass away as it were unenjoyed, nay, almost unperceived, or imbittered with a thousand imaginary woes? Have you not felt the importance of christian Forbearance, when you have beheld the most trifling provocation kindle the spark of anger, or the rage of resentment, between those who should be united by the ties of duty and affection? And have you not pitied the distresses of others, whose happiness, whose peace and comforts were all sacrificed to the caprices of an irritable, peevish and tyrannical mind? If you have, let your example shew, that you have not been instrumental in augmenting the sufferings of a fellow-creature, but that you have by every means in your power endeavoured to relieve them. Let it prove, that while your profession teaches you to admire the virtues of meekness, charity and Forbearance, you have not neglected to practise them.

THE most predominant passion of the human mind, though differently modified,
6 perhaps,

perhaps, is AMBITION ; or, in its most extensive sense, the love of POWER. We are too apt to mind “ high things” and to neglect those of lower degree. Yet very few from the bulk of mankind have ever an opportunity of displaying the wisdom of a legislator, the magnanimity of a monarch, or the clemency of a conqueror. But ALL are called upon to practise Forbearance, and ALL have sufficient opportunities to shew whether their professions of admiration are sincere or not. It is a duty that extends to every order of men. It is practicable in every condition of life ; in prosperity and adversity, in sickness and in health. It behoves us all therefore to cultivate it with ardor, because from every human being, we are assured, the exercise of it will be frequently required.

LET me further recommend the duty of christian Forbearance from the consideration of its salutary influence on the mind, and human conduct in general. It is the peculiar happiness of those who walk in

the paths of virtue, to find other incidental advantages beside those which they might have had more immediately in view. Every christian duty has its kindred virtues, which like so many graces generally attend it. The humble man is, for the most part, courteous, affable and kind. To the temperate belong the blessings of industry, competence and health; and with Forbearance are connected almost all the charities that endear us to each other. Considered in its extensive relation to other good qualities, I know not a greater perfection of character. It is, indeed, the result of much discipline, and the fruit of many virtues. The man who possesses a truly christian and forbearing spirit, must have acquired a conquest over every selfish and unruly passion. He must have often communed with his own heart, meditated on the various history of human frailties, and learnt to adore the mercies of God. Experience must have taught him how necessary it was to every social comfort, and reflection must have impressed the same truth

truth deeply on his mind. Not only those internal satisfactions which arise from the peace of godliness, and a conscience void of offence, will be the reward of him who has learnt Forbearance, but the confidence and love of his fellow-creatures. To him will the friend resort, who has suffered from the caprice of fortune, for consolation and assistance. At a time when the proud man would tell the story of his ruin with derision, and the mere worldling would stand aloof, or load him with reproaches, he would endeavour to alleviate his woes, and learn, from the example of his Saviour, not "to break a bruised reed."

I KNOW not any endowment of the mind that qualifies a man so well for communicating happiness to others as christian Forbearance. He has often opportunities, of administering comforts, and correcting errors of conduct, where the man of a morose disposition would be shunned as an enemy. In his own family, little accidents and misfortunes will be anxiously concealed from

the knowledge of a domestic tyrant, and such imperfections of temper and conduct as might have been easily corrected by confidence and kindness, will, under his inauspicious influence, grow up into habits of vice, supported and confirmed by cunning, falsehood, and duplicity. By needless severity, or the violence of passion, he is often kept a stranger to the real character of those whose minds he wishes to form, and whose happiness is most dear to him. In short, it is the man of a candid, gentle and forbearing spirit only, that is permitted to see the human heart laboring under its frailties. To him the sorrowing penitent will tell his griefs, and hope for pity and protection; to him the unfortunate, and those whose hearts are at variance with themselves, perhaps, and all the world, will fly for comfort, as to a FATHER and a FRIEND.

Would you, then, bless others and be blessed yourselves? would you extend your knowledge of human nature, while you give the last perfection to christian virtue? and
would

would you merit the gratitude and love of your fellow-creatures, by imitating the example of God himself? Learn to practise that Forbearance which the religion of Christ enjoins.

BUT in enforcing the obligations of some particular virtues, at large, many will from ignorance, perverseness, or concealed depravity, mistake their nature. To the exercise of every duty, as well as to the enjoyment of every pleasure, religion has fixed stated limits. Beyond these virtue loses her dignity, and pleasure its gratification. It may be proper therefore to state somewhat particularly the nature and degree of that Forbearance which christianity requires.

FORBEARANCE must not by any means be considered as allied to a tame acquiescence of mind, proceeding from indolence of disposition, or indifference to vice and error : nor must it be thought to arise wholly from that selfish baseness, which might lead us to

compound for the sins of others in consideration of our own. Equally remote is it from that hypocritical candor, and worldly compliance, which have no other object than that of interest, ease or gain. Christian Forbearance is the genuine offspring of an humble, peaceable and charitable disposition. Though averse to violence and contention, it is unwearied in well-doing; and though it disposes us to make all due allowance for the natural infirmities of man, it never leads us to countenance the wilfulness of sin.

◁ We are to forbear one another, IN LOVE, not from motives of lucre, or sensual indulgence. Far from being an indolent, or inactive habitude of mind, it is continually exerting itself for our own good, and the benefit of others; in mortifying every unruly appetite, in subduing every selfish passion, in administering the comforts of friendship, in exhorting with meekness, and by every means in our power manifesting "GOOD-WILL to man."

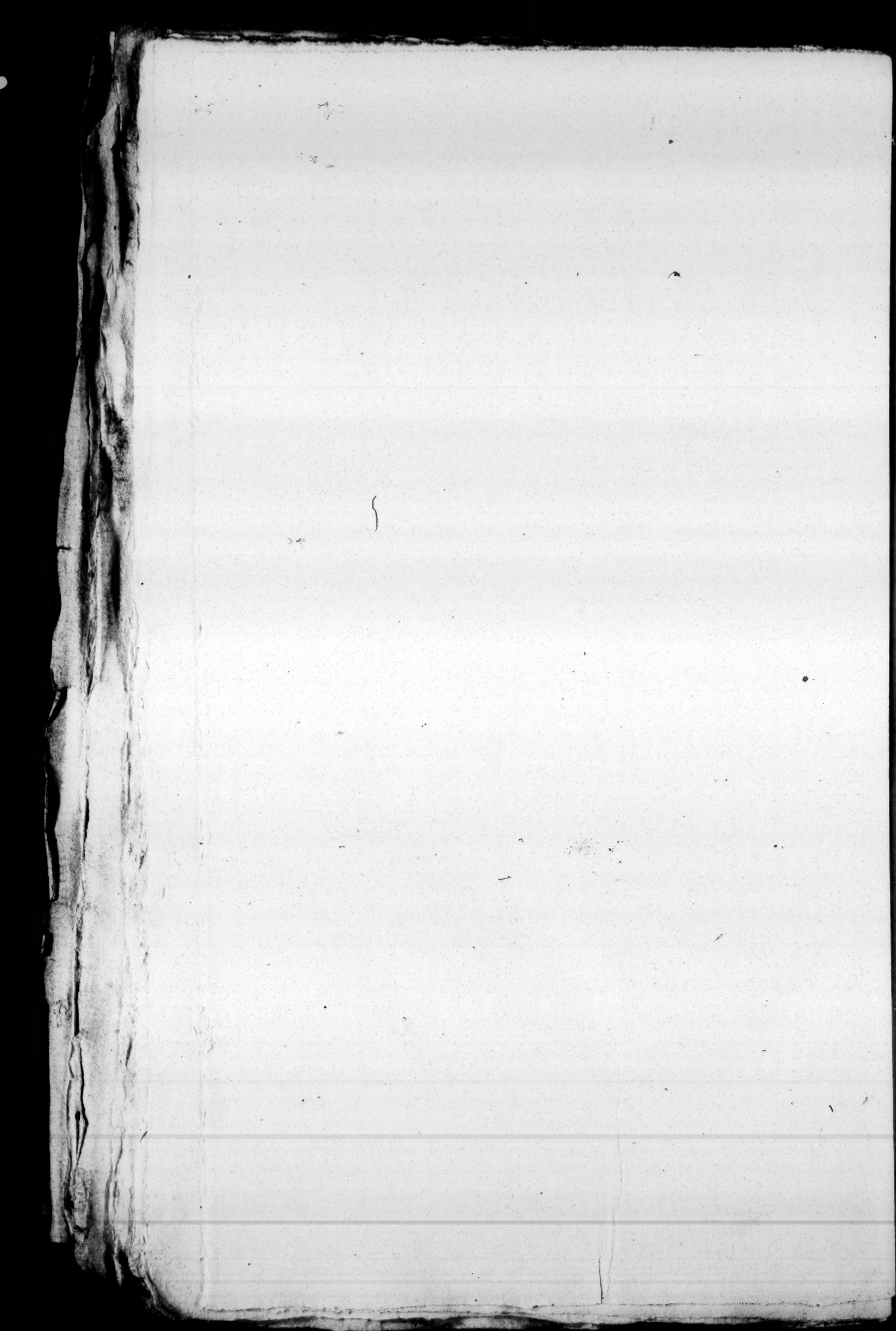
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FORBEARANCE, indeed, is the gracious and inviting form, under which the benevolence of a christian is most effectually extended. But would you have it more forcibly illustrated, let me exhort you to study the character and conduct of our blessed Lord and Saviour. His whole life was an act of Forbearance, from the bigotry and rage that persecuted his infancy, to the complication of ignorance and obstinacy, depravity and fraud, that opposed his divine ministry; from that, to the unrelenting cruelty that could scourge him with rods, and behold him expiring on the cross: yet "he went about "doing good." Though gentle, meek and forbearing, you will remember, his was not an INACTIVE life. He was continually fulfilling the will of his heavenly Father, and administering to the wants of man. Manifold were the errors which he corrected, many were the afflictions which he removed, and many were the blessings which he conferred. Through the gentleness of that wisdom which is from above, and that divine

benevolence which was at once ACTIVE and FORBEARING, he was wonderfully adapted to make known the knowledge of salvation ; to preach the gospel to the poor, to set the captive free, to heal the broken-hearted, and to comfort them that mourn. Learn, then, from the highest of all possible examples, that christian Forbearance is compatible with all the active duties of life. Remember, that he who practised it in the divinest manner, has required it of every one who professeth to be his disciple. Remember, also, that on the exercise of it depends, in an eminent degree, your own comforts, as well as the happiness of others, the love of man, and the favor of God.

HAD it not been a virtue of the highest import, it would not have been derived from such a variety of motives, nor enforced by such awful sanctions. With it are connected many of the most genuine fruits of the Holy Spirit ; without it, I know
not

not any christian virtue that we can practise as we ought. To him, therefore, who neglects it, the remission of sins, which comes only through the Forbearance of God, cannot be extended, and the blessedness of heaven has been offered in vain.



S E R M O N VII.

ON CHRISTIAN FORTITUDE.

PHILIPP. iv. 13.

*I can do all things through Christ which
strengtheneth me.*

IT should seem that few, if any, of the churches, which the great apostle of the Gentiles formed, gave him more comfort and satisfaction than that of Philippi. Their piety was fervent, steady and sincere; he had reason, therefore, “to thank God upon every remembrance of them,” not only for the success of his ministry, but for the gratitude and affection with which they relieved his distresses. “In the
“begin-

“beginning of the gospel,” * when he departed from Macedonia, they were the only church, he informs us, that communicated with him, “as concerning giving and receiving.” The cause of this epistle was to exhort them to constancy and perseverance in every christian duty, to guard them against false teachers, and to thank them for their liberality.

You need not be told perhaps that the holy apostle, after all his toils and dangers, was at this time a prisoner at Rome. His faithful and affectionate disciples at Philippi felt for the distresses of their venerable master, and by their active benevolence were anxious to relieve them. Supplies were sent him, accompanied, we might suppose, with expressions of the sincerest condolence, and the most affectionate sorrow.

It was an occasion, indeed, that might have powerfully excited those emotions, in the minds of men less virtuous and humane

* Philip. iv. 15.

than

than the people of Philippi. He that had corrected their errors and helped their infirmities; he that had preached to them, with such disinterested zeal, the gospel of peace; that had soothed their sorrows, taught them the principles of divine love, and opened to their minds the glorious prospect of immortality; after all "his labor of love," when he had borne the heat and burden of the day, and when he was "such a one as Paul the aged," was now torn from his beloved disciples, and doomed to the wretched state of a poor and helpless captive. But they were strangers to the dignity of his virtue, and the principles of his happiness, if they thought that the accumulated miseries of age, poverty and imprisonment could overwhelm him with sorrow, or deprive him of comfort. He had learned in whatsoever state he was therewith to be content. "I know," says the venerable apostle, "both how to be abased and how to abound; every where, and in all things I am instructed, both to be full and to be hungry, both
" to

“to abound and to suffer need.” “I can
“do all things,” continues he, “through
“Christ who strengtheneth me.”

THIS complacent dignity, this calm and invincible Fortitude, which he derived from the precepts and example of his divine Master, was the broad shield that protected him against every worldly danger and calamity. Though all around him was cruelty and oppression, bigotry and rage, yet he could retire into his own bosom, as into an impregnable fortress, that defied the assaults of misery, as the rock repels the waves of the sea. So far was he from being oppressed with the calamities of life, that he could convert them into a cause of triumph; and so far was he from being enthralled by such temptations as have the greatest influence over the human heart, that he could rejoice in them, as opportunities to prove his virtue.

IN this varied scene of good and evil, where we are exposed to a thousand dangers,

gers, and liable to suffer from a thousand frailties, some share of that steady Fortitude, which so eminently distinguished the great apostle, is necessary for every human being. Few of us, I hope, will ever have half the calamities to encounter that attended him during his ministry on earth; but yet there is no rank, or condition, without its trials and temptations. Let them come in what shape they will, Fortitude is necessary to enable us to CONQUER, or ENDURE. It is the principle that invigorates the soul when wearied with sorrow, and that renders the discipline of life a needful, but salutary exercise of its powers. In prosperity, it is necessary to secure us against the blandishments of pleasure and the allurements of vice; in adversity, it is equally necessary to silence the murmurs of discontent, and to prevent us from sinking under the pressure of calamity. In every situation, it gives us dignity of conduct, and stability of character.

Good resolutions, virtuous principles, and amiable dispositions will be of little benefit, without a considerable share of Fortitude to animate, to strengthen and to guard them. Yet this divine principle, which is the very soul of virtue and the safeguard of innocence, is but little cultivated and less practised. An yielding sensibility that admits all impressions, a disposition to cherish sorrow, and a fondness for complaint, might be considered among the variety of causes that undermine our virtue and disturb our happiness.

MANY have not sufficient strength of mind to resist the petty provocations to evil, that daily occur in their warfare with the world. For want of that fortitude which is necessary to obtain a conquest over ourselves, what repeated vexations continually arise! Vanity is frequently disappointed, and pride is hourly mortified or enraged. The social duties, perhaps, might be fulfilled, while they demand no abridgment of pleasure

pleasure, and little energy of mind ; there are few that will not support, with some degree of credit, the character of friendship, when no distress requires assistance, and no misfortune claims a participation of woe ; but should some trying emergence call for the exertion of every benevolent affection, and the sacrifice of some degree of ease, “ the love of many will wax cold, “ and they will grow weary in well-do- “ ing.” Not to dwell on the more arduous trials of Fortitude, to which we might be exposed, it may be remarked, that men are often negligent in bestowing that friendly admonition, or wholesome reproof, which is necessary to check the progress of evil, within the sphere of their own peculiar authority. Every relative duty of life, indeed, is occasionally omitted, or transgressed, not so much from any natural depravity of heart, as from a certain weakness, or indolence of mind, which contentedly acknowledges the reasonableness of virtue ; but tamely shrinks from the practice of it. A parent will often suffer evil ha-

bits to fix upon his child, not because he wants affection, or is indifferent to his welfare ; but because the exercise of that discipline, which is necessary to correct the frailties and perverseness of nature, is attended with some degree of pain.

THERE is scarcely a single virtue that does not require some portion of Fortitude to give it vigor and effect. Some sacrifice of pleasure or tranquillity, of profit or of ease, must frequently be made, if we wish to do good to others, or to benefit ourselves. If we have no steady principle of action in our own bosoms, no strength of soul that enables us to reject the paltry gratifications of indolence and self-love, we shall not only be strangers to the more distinguished virtues of humanity, but soon become slaves to every temptation that springs from sensuality, and every vice that arises from sinful indulgence.

YET there are occasions on which duty and inclination, vice and virtue, might ap-

pear to have the same object in view, and pursue it, apparently, by the same means. He must be a novice in the study of human nature, who believes that every good action proceeds from rectitude of principle, or virtuous dispositions. One will be generous from motives of christian benevolence, another from mere ostentation. One will be forbearing in his conduct from true meekness and gentleness of heart, another from indolence, or insensibility. Some will support calamity with the dignity of christian patience, others would claim the same merit by disguising a mind that never feels at all. Take from the motives of human actions vanity, selfishness and the applause of the world, and half the specious virtues that dazzle before our eyes, would vanish, like the meteors of the night at the approach of morn.

BUT motives thus corrupt, inconstant and capricious, must necessarily be productive of the greatest inconsistency of conduct; and hence it is not uncommon for

the man, who obtains the reputation of general kindness and good-nature abroad, to be wicked, tyrannical and morose at home. There is nothing can empower us to throw off this bondage of sin but christian Fortitude ; nothing but this can enable us to act from such motives as are worthy of immortal creatures ; or produce a conduct that shall be virtuous, rational and steady. A principle, therefore, that is necessary to guard us against all temptation, and support us under every calamity ; that gives life and energy to virtuous resolutions, and disarms vice of all power to hurt us, it behoves us to cultivate with ardor, and improve with diligence.

IN endeavouring to do this, the holy apostle, whose Fortitude was invincible, he who had often endured weariness and painfulness, watchings and fastings, hunger and thirst ; he who had been shipwrecked, scourged, and, in his old age, was now in prison, will direct us to the true source, from which all real greatness
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of soul must proceed ; for when he informed the Philippians that he “ could do all “ things,” he immediately adds the principle that enabled him thus to DO, to SUFFER, and to DIE—it was “ through CHRIST “ who strengthened him.”

WOULD you then acquire that Fortitude which animates hope and subdues fear, be assured it must be founded on a steadfast and lively faith in the glorious truths of the gospel. This is the only true source of that magnanimity which teaches us, under every calamity, “ to possess our souls in “ patience ;” and, under every temptation, enables us “ to overcome the world.”

BUT the Fortitude with which a christian’s mind is armed, widely differs from that boisterous courage, which is derived from the mere animal constitution, the fantastic principles of worldly honor, or the corrupt biaſſes of pride. Equally remote is it from that ferocious dignity which actuated a Roman’s soul. Actions that

were formerly supposed to aggrandize the mind, serve only to fill the bosom of a christian with pity or abhorrence. The divine Fortitude which he glories in is made manifest in suffering, as well as acting. That temerity which hurries many into unnecessary dangers, and that cowardice which makes others shrink from the scene of trial, he regards with equal disapprobation. The light and capricious motives that govern the mere worldling, who is a hero in PROSPERITY, and a coward in ADVERSITY, affect him not. Provided he can secure "a conscience void of offence," neither the censure nor the applause of men will alter his conduct.

IN order to acquire this firmness and stability of character, he deeply impresses his mind with the true sense of what he is; the heir of immortality, the probationary child of discipline, acting under the superintendence of that awful Being whose favor will exalt him to the glorious society of angels and archangels, and whose "stretched out
" arm,"

“ arm,” would reach him, in the hour of death, though “ the mountains were to fall
“ on him, and the hills were to cover him.”

FULLY persuaded of this, will he not run the race that was set before him with patience? will he suffer the temptations of the world to allure him from his course, or will he sink under those sorrows, which hereafter shall be no more remembered than the idle terrors of a dream? No; through the mediation of his blessed Lord and Saviour, who strengtheneth him, he will be able “ to DO and to SUFFER all things.”

BUT in order to possess a virtue, whose operation is so powerful and extensive throughout the whole system of life, we must have the most unbounded trust and confidence in the truth of God’s holy word. It must not be a tame acquiescence, or ignorant belief; but it must be that lively faith, which the apostle beautifully calls “ the anchor of the soul,” and “ which is
“ both sure and stedfast.” The man whose
religion

religion is only half formed, or whose mind is poisoned with the vanities of scepticism, can never hope to be shielded against temptation, or calamity, by any of that Fortitude which confers dignity and safety on a christian. He will be constantly entangled with petty difficulties, always vulnerable and often wretched; but he who acts from some fixed principles and strength of soul, is manly and consistent in his conduct. He will see his path while others are surrounded with darkness, and the random dart that "pierces them through with many sorrows," will pass by him without inflicting a wound. On such a character you may rely with confidence, and will seldom have cause to complain of the LITTLE vices and vexations that arise from fickleness and caprice.

BUT the man who, for want of that Fortitude which springs from religion, falls into the wretched state of what the scriptures call "a doubtful mind," is often held in suspense between opposing principles

ples of conduct. Sometimes he leans to the world, and sometimes is afraid of offending God. Sometimes he doubts whether the pleasure of sinning might not be an adequate recompence for the punishment of it, and always waits for the preponderating motives of appetite and passion to determine his conduct. Such a man neither admits the law of God, nor is a law unto himself. He is a wretched, irresolute being, in danger from every temptation that meets him, and oppressed with every trifling calamity that befalls him; in his actions, therefore, we neither expect to see either dignity, consistency or virtue. He might occasionally discover some goodness; but it will always be unsteady and capricious. It will be like the goodness of Ephraim and Judah, which the prophet elegantly compared to "a morning cloud" and the early dew."

WHENCE is it that vice and disorder of every kind abounds in human society? It is not because men do not know their duty,

duty, but because they want Fortitude to PRACTISE it. While the world offers no temptations, indeed, they can proceed in the paths of virtue; if VIRTUE it may be called; when the evil days are come, in which they find no pleasure, they can discover the folly and condemn the dissipation of youth; and when the hour of death is at hand, they feel and acknowledge the importance of piety and prayer. On all occasions, and at every season of life, man is disposed to be virtuous, except at those particular periods, when the duties peculiar to his station are practicable, and the proof of his obedience is required.

THIS tardy knowledge and these lagging resolutions, which are not formed till the hour of trial is past, can proceed only from a feebleness and depravity of mind, disposed at all times to listen to the calls of passion, rather than to the voice of reason and the commands of God. Thus are many held in a state of wretched bondage to the world, and pass away their lives in
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the servitude of sin. But yet nothing is wanting to dissolve the charm but christian Fortitude. That would enable them to "acquit themselves like men." That would clear away those mists of ignorance and error which render life, INDEED, "a vale of "darkness and shadow of death;" and that alone would enable us "to do all things "through our Lord and Saviour," by giving us a bright and steady prospect of the glory which is immortal.

LET me exhort you, therefore, to cultivate and practise a virtue, with which every intellectual excellence is connected, and on which almost every other virtue depends; a virtue which is, perhaps, of all others the most necessary for this our probationary state, and which is the source of happiness, as well as the safeguard of innocence.

BUT it may be necessary to distinguish that Fortitude which animates and supports a christian's soul, from that which
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the mere man of the world might possess. They are very different in their causes, their mode and extent of operation. The former proceeds, chiefly, from the fear of God, an habitual reverence of his divine laws, and the most unbounded confidence in his mercy and his truth. The latter generally arises from constitution, is increased by pride, and for the most part directed by what is called honor. Its sphere of action therefore is not very extensive. To maintain a sort of tranquillity in the midst of danger, not to be affected by the common calamities of life, and to meet death with indifference, or at least without betraying fear, are the principal characteristics of worldly Fortitude. But the Fortitude of a christian takes a far more extensive range. In fighting the good fight of faith, he is exposed to much greater ills. Many enemies will assail him beside the fear of danger, of poverty and death; but he considers none more formidable, perhaps, than his own HEART. He dreads the loss of innocence and the displeasure of God,

God, much more than the man of honor and of courage, can dread the shame of cowardice, or the scorn of the world. He is therefore always active in resisting temptation, in mortifying those evil dispositions that otherwise might soon get dominion over him ; in subduing the passions to the government of reason ; in correcting the infirmities of his own temper ; in bearing with those of others, and submitting to many inconveniencies, and, perhaps, reproaches, in order to do them good.

THE christian's Fortitude, therefore, is connected with every duty of life ; the worldling's little more than animal courage, modified by pride and the caprice of men. So far is Fortitude of this description from being related to the more estimable virtues of humanity, that a man may be impious, cruel and oppressive, false, proud and tyrannical, at once both prodigal and rapacious, and yet possess it in its fullest extent.

BESIDE

BESIDE this striking difference between the Fortitude of a christian and that of the world, the one is often turbulent and fluctuating, often engaged in acts of violence and blood; the other is calm and steady, and always directed to some good. The one is frequently hostile, imperious and overbearing, the other is friendly and humble, gracious and benevolent.

BETWEEN principles so widely different, it behoves us to make the most careful distinction. There is a species of Fortitude which might serve to strengthen the most brutal dispositions of the mind; but christian Fortitude is calculated to correct whatever might be harsh and severe in our conduct, as well as to give dignity and force to every thing charitable and kind. So far is it from inspiring us with stoical apathy, or pride, and raising us above all human concerns, that it enables us to share in them with greater interest and advantage. It strengthens what is weak, and supports what is already strong. It checks
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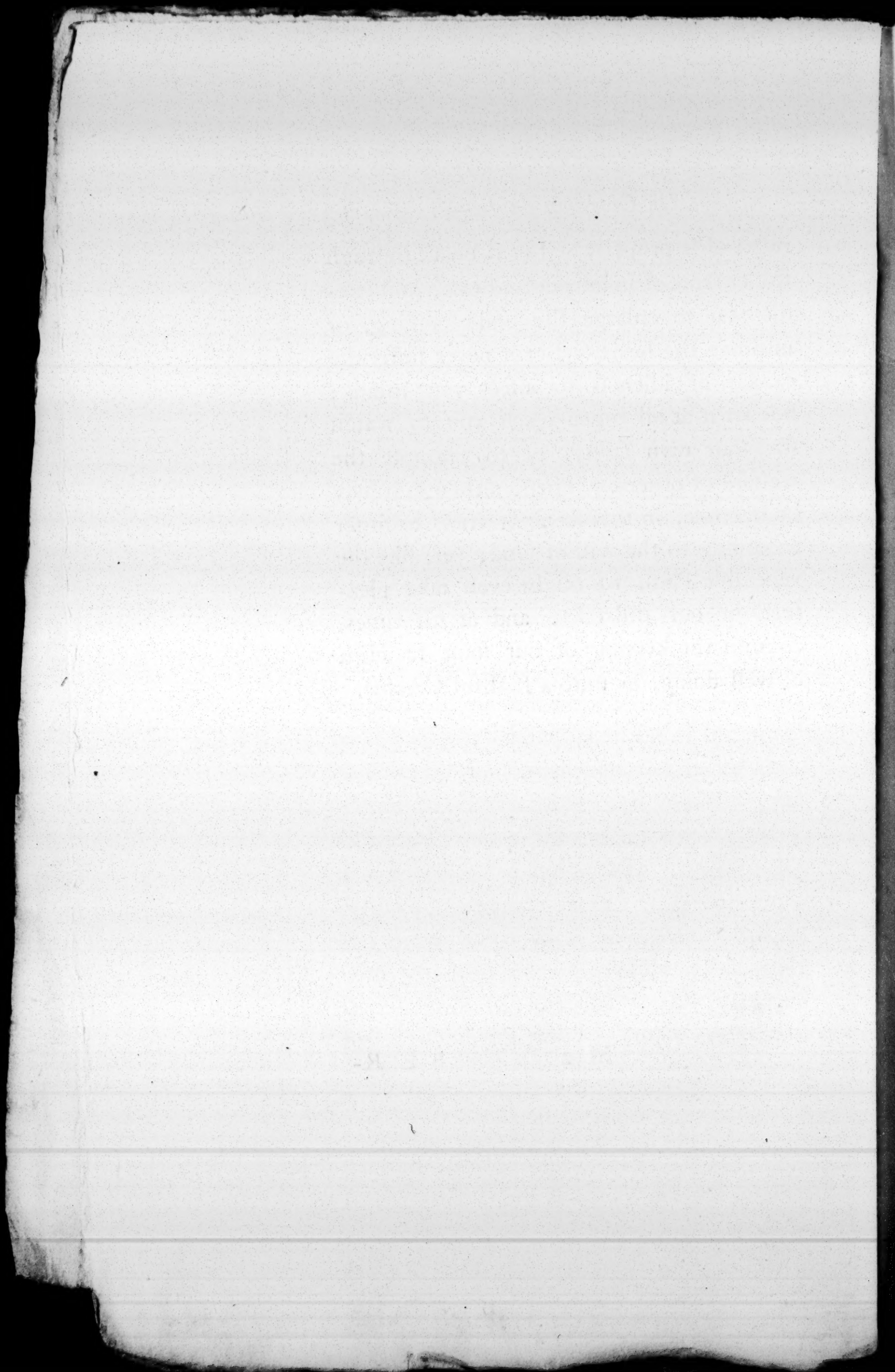
all rash presumption, and yet encourages us “to rejoice in hope.” In short, under every difficulty and danger, it arms us with the shield of faith and “the helmet of salvation,” and renders the various ills of life our glory and not our shame.

IN cultivating this divine virtue, which enables us thus “to do all things through Christ who strengtheneth us,” let us be earnest, and sincere. That you might not form any mistaken opinion concerning it, learn to guard yourselves equally against that imposing softness and feebleness of mind, which is generally produced by indolence and indulgence, or the pleasing delusions of an active, but unrestrained imagination; that dull indifference, or churlish apathy, which self-love might dignify with the name of virtue; and that temerity of conduct and obstinacy of resolution, which admit not of guidance, reflection or controul; but which have notwithstanding been mistaken for Fortitude.

REMEMBER, also, that you are not to wait for the exercise of this great virtue till some strange emergence, or uncommon trial shall arise; for if you do, you most assuredly will fail. Fortitude, like every other virtue, must be cherished by habit, and improved by discipline. If, therefore, you would wish, like the holy apostle, “to do ALL things,” you must begin by learning to do COMMON things. Daily, and almost hourly, you will find occasion for the exertion of christian Fortitude. When no danger threatens, and no temptation is near, when no misfortune calls for resignation, no sufferings of the body require patience, and no conflicts of the mind demand the soul’s exertion, let it be employed in overcoming that slothful and selfish indulgence, into which men of every description are so apt to fall. Let it withdraw your attention from trifling concerns, and direct it to those important objects, with which human life will always abound. Let it teach you the inestimable value of time, and direct you to employ every moment

ment of it properly. Let it break through the charms of indolence and ease, and enable you to enlarge the understanding, or improve the heart. Let it never suffer the canker of idleness to infect your minds; but let it at all times teach you to watch for your own safety, or to promote the welfare of others. Then, although it may be our fate, in this scene of trial, to suffer according to the will of God; yet, like the venerable Paul, we might even take pleasure in our distresses, and at all times, commit the keeping of our souls to Him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator.

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S E R M O N VIII.

ON THE YOKE OF CHRIST.

MATT. xi. 30.

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

AMONG the inferior excellencies of the holy gospel, we may rank the many chaste and beautiful metaphors with which it abounds. Under the familiar expressions of the sower and the shepherd, the sheepfold and the vine, our Lord illustrated the most important truths, and taught the most essential duties. Far from attempting any unnatural display of learning, or of art, in addressing himself to the

multitudes that thronged to hear him, he selected such images as were familiar to every one's mind; and by these means administered his doctrines in a more pleasing form, and conveyed his instructions with greater effect.

IN the verses preceding the text, he invited men to become his disciples, in the most gracious and condescending manner. Without openly arraigning any established system, or corrupt practice, he only asserted that "his yoke was easy, and his burden light."

THE figure was admirably adapted to the occasion, and was at the same time, forcible and plain. The Jews, when they reflected on the miseries of captivity, when they considered the oppression of the Romans, the spiritual pride of the Rabbis, and the intolerable burden of laws, traditions and ceremonies which the Pharisees had laid on their necks, must have felt and understood the metaphor of a *YOKE* in its

full force. Such, however, was our Saviour's use of it, that it could not have offended any. Yet it must have awakened their attention, and, possibly, might have led them, by a series of reflections, to the most useful meditation. It was a proof that the heavenly Messiah meant to be the friend of man, and afforded an instance of his wisdom, his gentleness and love. He did not declare that his laws imposed no restraint. He spoke only comparatively; for the advantage and necessity of submitting to the YOKE, in some sense or other, is manifest throughout the works of creation. The plant requires a considerable degree of culture before it reaches the perfection of its nature, and the luxuriance of the vineyard must be restrained by the pruning-hook, or its fruits will neither be rich nor abundant. The earth must be broken with the ploughshare and the harrow before the harvest can be reaped, and till the beast of the field is tamed to obedience, he is wild, untractable and useless. Equally necessary for the improvement of the human heart, is the

YOKE of the gospel, or the laws and discipline of religion. Were every passion permitted to seek its gratification without controul, were every wish that promises pleasure, cherished in the bosom, and suffered to expand itself into action without restraint, the minds of men would resemble a neglected vineyard, or a barren waste.

THE necessity of government and subjection, therefore, being admitted, let us examine with what propriety it can be asserted, that the YOKE of christianity is easy, and its burden light.

WHEN we consider the great variety of ceremonies which the Mosaic law required, the numerous fasts and festivals, the length of their duration, and the consequent expence and inconvenience of them; when we reflect also on the various forms of purification, the different kinds of sacrifices that were enjoined, and the increasing weight of offerings and atonements; we cannot hesitate a moment to pronounce the

YOKE

Yoke of Christ comparatively easy, with regard to these and other external burdens. It would be no less so, if the pure and simple institutions of the gospel were contrasted with the pomp and solemnity, the shameful extortions and wicked delusions, of Pagan priesthood.

BUT independent of the advantages which christianity may derive from a comparison with every imperfect and corrupt system, it will be found, that the law of our blessed Redeemer, when duly considered, is, in itself, easy, and the burden which he lays upon us is light. For what does it require of us? In order to satisfy ourselves in this particular, let us not receive, with blind submission, and obstinate ignorance, the systems of vain, fallible, interested or corrupt men; but let the holy gospel speak for itself. Let our understanding be enlightened, and our hearts improved, by that plainness and simplicity of instruction, which could speak intelligibly "to all that had ears to hear," and
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which revealed the words of eternal truth
“to babes.”

It will be found, by every impartial enquirer, that christianity only enjoins the practice of those virtues which have a tendency to promote our own happiness, as well as the happiness of mankind in general, and bids us abstain from such vices and pleasures as have a direct tendency to misery and guilt. This is the leading principle of christian morality; and to render it effectual, we are directed to meditate often on the wisdom and goodness of God; not to forget that we are mere sojourners here, and frequently to pour out our souls to Him in prayer and supplication, or in hymns of thanksgiving and praise.

By these exercises of piety, the mind is formed to dispositions of peace and benevolence. We are daily taught the lesson of gratitude by the benefits and blessings which the Almighty is continually showering on us; we learn humility from the
grandeur

grandeur and the power, which the works of his hands declare, from our own weakness and the probationary scene of human life. Nor are the duties of charity, forbearance and compassion, less effectually promoted, by meditations on the mercies of God, and the example of our Lord and Saviour.

RELIGION, therefore, by cherishing these pious dispositions in the soul, teaches us to extend their benign influence to our fellow-creatures. The heart, warmed with the calm emotions of christian piety, learns to unite our duty to God with our duty to man; and while it contemplates the object of infinite goodness and infinite perfection, humbly strives to imitate it.

WITHIN the boundaries of his duty, the christian may enjoy the highest gratifications and the most exalted pleasures. Though the present life be a school of discipline and scene of trial, yet a thousand
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comforts will spring up before him, which he only can truly relish, and justly value. He will drink largely of the rich stream of divine benevolence, that refreshes without intoxication, and “use the things of “ this world without abusing them.”

To circumscribe our conduct, therefore, and regulate our enjoyments by the dictates of that wisdom which is from above; to govern our actions from a regard to our own happiness, and the welfare of others, is surely to submit to “ a YOKE that is “ easy, and a burden that is light.”

COULD it be proved, indeed, that christianity requires a life of continual mortification; could it be said, with truth, that, while she enjoins a course of active benevolence, as most pleasing to God and most advantageous to man, she condemns us to the gloomy solitude of the cloyster or the cell; could it be thought, that vows of celibacy, the worshipping of images, and the idle pageantry of processions, were necessary

cessary to salvation ; or were it possible to believe, that instead of resignation, cheerfulness and contentment, moroseness, bigotry and superstition were necessary to the character of a christian, then, indeed, our Lord could not have said that “ his
“ YOKE was easy, or his burden light.”

BUT does any one think himself oppressed, because he is required to exercise the mild duties of humility, forbearance and brotherly love ?—I pity and lament the depravity of his heart. Is any one aggrieved because he is required to forgive injuries, to refrain from evil-speaking, to live in habits of charity, and cultivate the virtues of godly sincerity and truth ? Let him not murmur at the law of his blessed Redeemer, but let him deeply bewail, and study to correct, the infirmities of his nature. Or does the man of business, or of pleasure, think it burdensome to dedicate one day in seven to his Maker ? Is it a YOKE to “ enter
“ into his gates with thanksgiving, and into
“ his courts with praise ?” Is it a burden for
I him

him to make known his wants and offer up his prayers in private to the Lord of all nature, or join with others in acts of public worship and adoration? — We might grieve for his insensibility, and tremble for his ingratitude.

YET these are the principal duties which the law of Christ requires; a law so far from laying any restraint on a being capable of acting agreeably to the dictates of reason, and of pursuing the perfection of his nature, that it would be the voluntary and invariable rule of his conduct. Yes, were the spirits of just men made perfect, doomed, for a while, to sojourn once more in this vale of darkness, they would derive their pleasures from fulfilling the precepts, and imitating the example of the Saviour of the world.

BUT in recommending the obligations of virtue and religion to mere mortals, we must descend from the pleasing contemplation of what SUPERIOR beings would do,
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and consider ourselves at present as frail, imperfect creatures, laboring through a life of discipline, and exposed to a thousand temptations, at which, in a more exalted state, we might smile with such indifference as we do at the toys of infancy ; but which are notwithstanding powerful enough to please, and often to enthrall a mere child of dust.

PRESENT pleasure at the hazard of future pain ; sensual gratifications that quickly die away, and leave a sting behind ; worldly pursuits, that always lead to vanity and vexation, and often to misery and guilt ; shadowy appearances of bliss that tempt us, perhaps, under the forms of innocence and virtue ; all these will occasionally exert their influence on us to make us throw off that YOKE which was necessary to restrain the ardor of the passions, to check the precipitancy of our course, and teach us “ to walk soberly.”

WERE

WERE we, indeed, to meet with no difficulties in running the race that is set before us, we could claim no reward for running it with patience; and were there no allurements to entice us from our way, we should all arrive at the end of our journey, without incurring the imputation of guilt, perhaps, but, at the same time, without being able to produce any testimony of our fortitude, integrity or diligence. Temptations, therefore, are necessary to constitute a life of discipline, and furnish the soul with proper opportunities of exerting her powers. It was one great object with our blessed Lord to teach us how to guard against these assailers of our innocence, or by what means we might learn to overcome them. In order to accomplish an end so important, he does not withdraw us from every pleasure, or shut up our hearts to every enjoyment. He only withholds some gratifications from us, that he might confer others on us, of a purer nature and a more exalted degree.

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To resist the solicitation of sensual appetites, to hear with indifference the calls of worldly ambition, and to reject at all times, with christian fortitude, the offers of vanity and pride, may cost us a struggle, and that a painful one. The best of human beings, perhaps, will on some particular occasions, be disposed to consider the law of Christ as a YOKE, and the strict obedience of its laws as a burden ; but yet, in the hour of reflection, he will always be ready to confess, that the former “ is easy, “ and the latter light.” For let us contrast the satisfactions of the man who throws off the yoke of christianity, with his who willingly submits to it. Will the mere worldling be free from all restraint, because he rejects the needful discipline of heaven ? Will he have no master to “ exercise dominion over him,” because he hears not the word of his Lord and Redeemer ? Be assured he will ; and one (perhaps many) whose authority will, in the end, prove far more painful and oppressive. See the votary of pleasure begin the wild

career of life, without acknowledging any guidance or controul but his own passions. Perhaps, we must make some allowance for the modifications of fashion, and the influence of that fantastic principle, which is now generally understood, but shamefully expressed, by the term — HONOR. Behold him furnished by the bounty of providence with every blessing that human nature can enjoy, except that most valuable of all blessings, “a wise and understanding heart.” Possessing a plentiful fortune, health, spirits and sensibility, he throws himself on the world, as the free child of nature, and grasps at every pleasure within his reach. He thinks not from whence he came, he cares not whither he is going, nor ever looks up, with gratitude, or reverence, to that all-gracious Being who is his Father and his God.

I WILL not pursue a character of this description from excess of pleasure and of folly to excess of misery and contempt; from the brothel, the gaming-table and the
race-

race-ground, to disease and shame, to ruin and dishonor. I will not describe scenes which really exist, but which the imagination sickens at, and from which a virtuous mind must shrink with horror; nor could the power of language delineate the sufferings of guilty PRIDE reduced to POVERTY; the painful mortifications that are felt at every downfall, and the woeful experience of misery, without the consolations of innocence; till the scene that commenced with folly, closes in infamy, or self-destruction. Let us not dwell, therefore, on so gloomy a subject any longer, but rather consider the nature of those gratifications, which the man of the world proposes to himself, in a general and more temperate point of view.

EVERY pleasure which this world affords, to be truly relished, must be enjoyed within the boundaries of innocence and moderation. What transgresses the former will at length, most assuredly, lead to misery; whatever exceeds the latter will always defeat its own purpose, and

often bring on ruin, disease and death. Would you therefore enjoy the pleasures of the world? be assured, the wholesome restraints of christianity are necessary to render them worth enjoying. The ordinary comforts of life, as well as the beautiful works of nature, please by their vicissitude. After the duties of some useful avocation are performed, we feel more sensibly the comforts of our fire-side; and when the gloomy rigor of winter is past, we welcome the return of spring with livelier delight. Every common observer can tell us, that they who are carried round in the vortex of fashionable amusements, from day to day and year to year, are not the people who can be said to ENJOY pleasure, putting reflection and all sense of duty out of the question. The weariness of labor and the weakness of disease, perhaps, is surpassed by the languor of luxury, and the watchfulness of midnight revels. Add to this, that the enfeebled man of pleasure feels a thousand fictitious woes. Beside the ordinary ills of human life, he has a variety of
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of little envyings and strifes to encounter. To him belongs a profusion of woe that springs from false sensibility, or an enervated frame, and many a childish jealousy and contention arising from the silliest vanity, or the most contemptible pride. To these the bosom of a christian, engaged in some useful profession, or in the prosecution of some benevolent design, 'is, for the most part, a stranger.

WERE we to consider the gratifications of the proud man, we should soon discover here also, the folly and the sin of throwing off the yoke of Christ, and shrinking from the needful burden of his laws. He cannot endure the self-abasement which the gospel requires; he will not hear of meekness, and humbleness of mind; and yet by indulging a passion "which was not made for man," he will put it in the power of the meanest of his fellow-creatures to mortify and make him wretched. The doctrine of our blessed Lord would teach us "in honor to prefer one another;" and,

if we really were ambitious of distinction among men ; if we acted only from the desire of procuring their esteem and love, would not painful experience, after a short intercourse with the world, teach us the same amiable lesson ?

VARIOUS, indeed, are the pleasures and gratifications, which the world promises to those who are not directed in their enjoyments, by any regard to virtue or religion ; but it will soon appear, that none are worthy of a rational being but such as will bear the test of reflection. Too dearly purchased are those vain joys which at some future period, might embitter the hours of pious meditation, and disturb the quiet of a soul, that is about to go into the hands of its Creator ! Beyond the limits of christian duty, I know not what enjoyments there are which a wise man would wish for. The satisfactions of friendship, the comforts arising from the dearer relations of life, the pleasures of society, the occasional indulgence of innocent amusements,
and

and the moderate enjoyment of the divine bounty, all these, and many more, are comprised within the spacious boundaries of the great Creator's love; and, for the most part, are not only conferred as BLESSINGS, but commanded as DUTIES. The disciple of Christ, therefore, who makes his pleasures subservient to his real good, takes not so wide a range in the field of worldly enjoyments as the voluptuary, or the sensualist; but when he looks around him for enjoyment, culls out those gratifications which satisfy the appetite without cloying it, and which serve to exalt his nature, instead of degrading it. When the days of vanity are past, and the hour of reflection shall return, he will be able to look back on the path of life with gratitude, satisfaction and peace. His conscience, instead of reproaching him with a lavish waste of time, in the pursuits of folly or of vice, will whisper comfort to his soul, for having omitted no opportunity, in the time of gladness and prosperity, of connect-

ing the enjoyment of these and every other blessing with good-will to man, and thanksgiving to God.

OF the inevitable hour which must shortly put a period to every worldly comfort, and every worldly pursuit, we should never be forgetful. The remembrance of death was deemed a motive sufficient for the regulation of human conduct, even by Pagan philosophers. With how much superior force then ought it to apply to us! Whatever might be the paltry gratifications of the man of the world, at present, whatever might be the delusions of vanity and pride, and how flattering soever the satisfactions of wealth, ambition, or power, might now be, the time is drawing near, when thousands, on a retrospective view of life, will be convinced of the vanity and vexation of spirit, which attended their course, while in pursuit of what they thought happiness. When the day is far spent, and the night of death is at hand, then
they

they might be ready to acknowledge that the YOKE which their Saviour would have imposed on them "is easy, and that his burden is light." Then will they learn that "one thing only is needful," and devoutly wish that, like the holy apostles, they had forsaken all, and followed their Saviour and their Lord!

THUS, when we meditate on the subject of death, and the awful concerns of eternity; when we remember that we are heirs of immortality, and that the favor of the Almighty is either secured or lost by our conduct here, we must think it reasonable and we should think it happiness, to sacrifice every worldly gratification to the grand duty of pleasing God, and living agreeably to his laws. But should this cost us a struggle too painful for our fortitude to bear, we might be assured that we are still "held in the bond of iniquity," and that fixed must be our resolution, fervent our prayers, and steadfast our faith, before we
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can hope “to hunger and thirst after
“righteousness,” or make it “our meat
“and drink to do the will of God.”

IF on communing with your own hearts, you find that your pleasures and enjoyments are not circumscribed by the wisdom and the goodness of the Supreme Being, as manifested in the gospel, do not hesitate to regard THAT, as a certain symptom of growing depravity.

WE do not say that to fulfil the duty of a christian requires no efforts and no restraints. That would be to deny the experience of all. But the exertion of these efforts, and the patient submitting to these wholesome restraints, constitute the true happiness and glory of every rational being.

IN travelling the road that leads to immortality of bliss, we should consider ourselves as under the guidance of that all-gracious,

gracious Power, from whose displeasure not the whole universe can afford us any refuge, and whose favor would be cheaply purchased at the sacrifice of the whole world. We should reflect, that this is the mere dawn of our existence; that soon “the gates of everlasting life will be opened;” and that we have it in our power to enter into the society of angels, and to enjoy the presence of God.

WHEN habits of meditation on these glorious truths, are once formed, a corresponding course of actions, under the influence of divine grace, might be reasonably expected. Habits of christian piety, indeed, will not be so easily acquired, as habits of vice and wickedness; but not the most profligate will deny, that they are productive of greater satisfaction; and the most ignorant know, that when once acquired, they are easily preserved.

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THE law of Christ, therefore, is only a yoke and a burden to man, either in a state of undisciplined nature, or when under a cloud of ignorance and superstition, as were the Jews to whom our Lord addressed himself, in the words of the text; or when we begin to combat the vices and imperfections of our nature with feeble efforts and half-formed resolutions; when we waver between the obligations of DUTY, and the allurements of SIN, and with a divided heart, wish to serve God and Mammon, then, indeed, the YOKE is galling, and the burden grievous. In every other point of view, it must be considered, if considered at all, as the chief comfort and the most glorious privilege of man.

WITH the greatest propriety, therefore, we may apply to christianity the wise man's beautiful personification of wisdom, and assert, that "she is more
" precious than rubies, and all the things
" thou canst desire are not to be com-
" pared

“pared unto her. Length of days is in
“her right hand, and in her left hand
“riches and honor. Her ways are ways
“of pleasantness, and all her paths are
“peace.” God grant, that in those paths
we may walk, and at the close of life be
deemed worthy of a happy immortality,
through the mediation of our Lord and
Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

S E R M O N IX.

ON SUPERSTITION.

A C T S xvii. 22.

Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious.

IN contemplating the history of the human mind, we may observe, that there are some virtues of a fixed and permanent nature, and others that fluctuate and vary with the manners and prejudices of different times. Practices that were once regarded as rational and pious, have in the lapse of a few years been deemed criminal and weak. The obligations of justice and of truth, indeed, are immutable, and their extent,
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in general, is sufficiently determined ; but it is not so easy to fix limits to duties that depend chiefly on opinion, and that are always checked, or promoted, by the influence of the passions. Hence we often regard with pity, or contempt, the conduct which another may deem meritorious ; and sometimes condemn those qualities in our neighbour as frailties, on which he, perhaps, builds his expectations of friendship and affection.

NOTHING can illustrate these remarks better than the different lights, in which men have always been led to consider their fellow-creatures, on account of their practice and opinions in religion. Errors arising from excess of fear and credulity, from too great confidence in secondary aid, and too scrupulous attention to external rites, have been comprehended under the general term—*SUPERSTITION*.

THESE, indeed, are the grand sources from which the corruptions of every religion

ligion have flowed; and these are errors of which men in all ages have mutually accused each other. Had the Jews been questioned about Superstition, they would have found it no where but in the impure rites and idolatrous practices of the Gentiles. The worshippers of Pagan Rome, not content to pity and despise the follies of Gothic ignorance, could stigmatize the religion of Christ with Superstition. The holy apostle might well complain of the ostentatious follies of the Greeks, and the gross corruptions of the Jewish Rabbis; while the Papist, perhaps, if he ever uses the word, applies it only to the weary pilgrim that travels to Mecca, or the fierce barbarian that delights in sacrifices of human blood.

THUS vanity and pride, co-operating with prejudice, will often sanctify our own delusions, and make us reprobate, with too much severity, the errors of others. But from the general diffusion of knowledge, and the rational interpretation of christia-

nity, religion is no longer in danger of such corruptions as formerly prevailed. However some may dread, with unnecessary zeal, the prevalence of certain rites and ceremonies, they need not apprehend the cruelties that were formerly inflicted on heretics, nor the horrors that attended persecution. There was a time, indeed, when Superstition among us was arrayed in all the terrors that imagination can conceive. She was no less the instrument of violence and fraud, than of malice and revenge. At present she can be regarded only as the timid child of folly, credulity and fear. We may dismiss from our imaginations, therefore, the barbarous scenes of past ages, and consider Superstition only as it exists in some speculative tenets and exterior ceremonies, which by furnishing the mind with secondary aid, are supposed to cherish and enliven its devotion.

NOTWITHSTANDING the progress of civilization, and the general improvement of human society, there still subsists a won-

derful difference among christians on the important subject of religious worship. Between the sectary who rejects all form, and needs no aid from the institutions of men, who would reduce every subject of divine revelation to the level of his reason, and who abhors the friendly guidance and control of others ; between such a disciple of Christ, and the man who adores the host, or the visionary mystic who pretends to reveal the secrets of the spiritual world, there is almost as much difference as between the followers of different prophets, or the worshippers of different gods.

Ask the sectary what keeps him at such a distance from his fellow-christians, he will tell you it is folly and superstition. Ask the catholic why he considers all who differ from the holy church in practice and opinions, as wretches that are “ in the
“ gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity ;” and he will reply because they have wilfully corrupted the word of God, rebelled against the authority which Christ himself

O 2 established,

established, and sacrificed the truths of the gospel to their interest, their selfishness and pride.

LET us enquire whether there is not a point equally remote from these extremes, where a rational protestant may rest in safety, and enjoy the testimony of a good conscience, without fearing the imputation of Superstition on the one part, a corrupt mind on the other.

SUPERSTITION, though seldom mentioned but as an alarm to terror, hatred or contempt, proceeds originally from passions rationally excited, and dispositions, which, abstractedly considered, are indications of virtue: but which, if thoroughly depraved, become the most abundant source of evil.

FROM the desire of pleasing and the fear of offending God, every thing that is praiseworthy occasionally proceeds; but to the same grand motives of piety and goodness, may be ascribed some share of that Superstition

stition and credulity which has been known to characterize the minds of men, no less distinguished for their wisdom than their virtue. We never feel our weakness so forcibly, as when we contemplate the wisdom and power of the Deity. The relation in which we stand to Him appears so very distant, the dispensations of his providence are so mysterious, and the dread of incurring his displeasure is so awful and overwhelming, that the mind sinks into helpless imbecillity, and joyfully embraces every means of quieting its apprehensions and helping its infirmities.

IN such a state, therefore, when the child of discipline and candidate for heaven, looks back on his manifold transgressions, and considers that “the prize of his high “calling” is at stake, can you wonder that fear should sometimes take too strong hold of him, and that he should grasp, with too much eagerness, at every trifling assistance and every feeble stay, which the policy of man could offer, or the anxieties of hope

devise? Can you wonder that human beings, conscious of their own unworthiness, should in all ages and in all nations come to the throne of grace, with peace-offerings and sacrifices in every varied form?

THIS timid humility of mind, founded on a conviction of its wants and a deep sense of its frailties, it has been the constant endeavour of interested and corrupt men to abuse. Their endeavours have too often been successful; and under the appearance of religion, superstitions have arisen so gross and barbarous, as to leave us in doubt whether to wonder more at the baseness, or the folly of mankind. On those passions and principles, which were intended by nature to give fervor to our piety, and more interesting views of the Almighty, systems of the most despicable fraud and cruelty have been formed.

AFTER contemplating these evils, some have shrunk from every thing allied to the principles of Superstition, with that jealous
dread

dread which we generally feel of dangers that are past, and calamities under which we see others still labor. But in guarding against errors of conduct, and abuses of reason, it is difficult to avoid extremes. Man is too often, in religious concerns, the abject slave of fear and Superstition, or the weak, but consequential upstart of vanity and pride.

YET it must be allowed, I think, that on our reformation from a church, whose corruptions had long disgraced the christian world, that the guardians of the protestant faith conducted themselves with becoming wisdom and moderation. Abolishing all practices that might lead to corruption and hypocrisy, rejecting all doctrines that debased the purity of the gospel, by pretending to compound for iniquity, and laying aside ceremonies that were deemed idle and superstitious, they retained such ordinances as were thought necessary helps to devotion, and established such discipline as the welfare of every visi-

ble church, perhaps, requires. Yet rites that are in themselves perfectly harmless, and customs that appear not only rational and innocent, but proper and beneficial, have been thought to fall within the boundaries of Superstition.

Who then shall fix the nature of a quality that has some relation to goodness, though it has often been made the instrument of evil? Were we to reduce our form of worship to the narrow system of the jealous and untractable sectary*; were all order and establishment abolished; were the voice of discipline no longer heard, and the christian faith left to shift for itself, in conventicles or the croud, still we should not escape the charge of Superstition. There are men who, in their superior wisdom, would, as it were, cut the tie that connects us with our Maker. They

* I mean no general opprobrium by these epithets; on the contrary, I am ready to acknowledge, that I know many sectaries, who are neither 'jealous nor untractable,' but good subjects and sincere christians.

will

will not hear of prayer, thanksgiving or praise. When oppressed with sorrow, we must not breathe a sigh for peace “to Him “that is mighty to save,” we must share the blessings of the Almighty Father without acknowledgment, and we must feel his goodness, his wisdom and his power without any expressions of gratitude or adoration.

SUCH are the sentiments of the philosophical unbeliever; and duties of piety which christians of every denomination deem important, he will debase by the opprobrious epithet of Superstition. The God he worships, indeed, is himself, though in disguise, perhaps, and his rule of action is what he might think proper to understand by the fitness of things.

SURROUNDED, therefore, with errors of opposite extremes, to what shall we appeal for the regulation of our conduct and the conviction of our minds? We have but one resource; it is that
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soundness of mind which can arise only from the exercise of reason, when neither corrupted by prejudice nor passion, but willing to be assisted by the revealed word of God.

LET us endeavour to make this, in some measure, our test on the present occasion, and, I trust, it will appear, that the opinions of those who charge us with Superstition in our religious worship, lead to inconsistency, and, to use the gentlest expression, originate in mistake. Yet let it be remembered, that we have no occasion to vindicate any practices that withdraw the mind from the Creator to the mere creature ; we contend for no doctrines that are calculated to corrupt the ignorant and deceive the weak ; we wish only to defend those institutions which serve to enliven devotion, and those regulations which may be considered as the decent ornaments of christian piety.

ON every occasion that requires the exertion of the mind, we feel the want of adventitious aid. The warrior's courage must be seconded by martial music, by the display of some favorite banner, or the flattering presence of his leader ; the emotions of pity and compassion, of generosity and friendship, are often excited by circumstances that are by no means essential to the nature of those virtues ; and even the calmer operations of the mind, such as study and meditation, are promoted by scenes of solitude and silence. Every passion, indeed, and every duty dependent on it, may thus be cherished, or restrained, by the influence of particular incidents ; and the seizing of these, on proper occasions, will give energy to virtue, and furnish the soul with the most salutary means of exercising its powers.

WHILE every virtuous principle thus requires the assistance and support of something external, shall religion be left alone to languish, or to wear the cold appearance

ance of philosophical speculation? Is there no assistance that might be reasonably called in to cherish and enliven the devotional spirit? Yes, like every other sentiment, it may be strengthened and improved by a regard to time, and place, and other circumstances. I pity the insensibility of him, who can go to the temple of God to celebrate the birth, the passion and resurrection of our Saviour, without feeling some additional fervor arising from the occasion.

OUR blessed Lord thought proper frequently to go up into a mountain, or retire into the desert, apart to pray; and before his death, he taught his disciples to commemorate his last sufferings by the holy ceremony of eating bread and drinking wine. The prophet Daniel, also, during his captivity, when “he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God,” seems to mention it as a peculiar comfort, that the windows

windows of his chamber opened towards Jerufalem.

FROM principles that are clearly analogous, I cannot but think, that the holy edifice which in ages far remote was consecrated to the peculiar service of religion, which is venerable from its antiquity, and still more so as the place where the prayers and the alms of thousands of our fore-fathers have gone up for a memorial before God, is far better adapted for a place of public worship, than the new-built conventicle or the open field. I do not mean with regard to the efficacy of our prayers in the sight of God. He listens to the sighing of a contrite heart, as well as to the best and most comprehensive form of words ; he can understand the strong, but complicate desire, which labors in vain for adequate expression, and anticipate the pious wish that might one day brighten into virtue and happiness.

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IT is not, therefore, with any relation to HIM, but to OURSELVES, that we embrace every means of awakening sentiments of religion, that otherwise might lie dormant, and kindling the warmth of devotion.

WE are not beings of such an exalted order, as to act invariably according to the dictates of pure intelligence. Our very thoughts, wishes, sentiments and conduct are often influenced by relative causes and mere sympathetic affections. Those who do not feel, or cannot understand how the mind borrows ideas, and derives assistance from the circumstance of place, for instance, in religious worship, are destitute of that delicacy of sentiment which is necessary to the perfection of christian piety. But though you may want it on this occasion, yet you might experience some portion of it on others. Have you never viewed, with recollected pleasure, the spot where the amusements of childhood were enjoyed? Has no place been sanctified to you by friendship and affection? Do
you

you know what it is to visit the tomb where a parent sleeps, or to walk over the ashes of one you loved? If you do, you will not refuse some degree of sympathetic affection, arising from the consideration of mere PLACE, in the minds of those who are truly pious, though you may not feel it yourselves. Avoid, therefore, the harsh error of calling that Superstition in another's conduct, which in your own you dignify with the name of virtue or sensibility. Be assured, it is the same string that vibrates, though touched by a different hand.

FROM principles perfectly similar, the patriot would feel his ruling passion grow warmer on the plains of Marathon, or in the Streights of Thermopylæ; and the votary of the muses would wander, with peculiar delight, on the banks of some consecrated stream, where he might trace the footsteps of his favorite bard.

THE mind has recourse to a thousand subsidiary arts, to foster those wishes and
affections

affections to which it is most prone, though from some unreasonable prejudice or dread, it will reject the like assistance where religion is concerned. Yet this mode of conduct is generally marked with inconsistency and folly. The sectary who treats with scorn that part of religious discipline, which appoints certain festivals and days to be kept holy, with proper services adapted to the occasion, will notwithstanding regularly celebrate the birth-day of a child, and be foremost in the croud to commemorate a political revolution*.

IN every thing but religion it is the fashion to cherish sensibility by the most studious observances, and actions that border on affectation and folly. Fear, on trifling occasions, is carried to the most ridiculous excesses; a fondness for complaint and a disposition to be wretched, because,

* Almost all the sermons preached and published on the centenary of the Revolution were by Dissenters.

perhaps,

perhaps, it may be thought amiable, are sometimes indulged so far as to become almost contemptible. Yet with some allowance we behold the relic of a departed friend made “an ornament for the neck;” and the emblem of fidelity and truth, which awakens memory and cherishes affection, worn and admired with SUPERSTITIOUS fondness.

IF recourse be thus had to external objects, in order to indulge other passions and principles, why should Religion be stripped of every circumstance that might serve to enliven her sentiments, and every attraction that renders her service more interesting and delightful? The spirit of christianity, indeed, is not favorable to pomp and ostentation; nor should an attention to trifling ceremonies be thought a substitute for its essential duties; but yet when we consider the languid indifference of some, and the thoughtless neglect of others, in their duty towards God, every collateral assistance

should surely be embraced to rouse the understanding and interest the heart, on the most important subject that can possibly engage the mind of man.

BUT some are averse to institutions of every kind, because they hate obedience ; and often the same unsocial spirit which separates them from the national church, renders them hostile to the established forms of government. When subjects of greater importance are wanting, they can descend to censure, with outrageous zeal, the mere form in which the sacraments are administered, the very habit which was thought necessary merely to distinguish the order of the clergy, and even the posture in which we address our prayers to heaven ; though KNEELING is sanctified by the practice of prophets and apostles, nay by the example of Christ himself, and is an attitude of supplication so natural, that instinct teaches it to the wandering Savage.

OTHERS

OTHERS are so afraid of Superstition, that they will shrink from every appointed form of duty, merely to indulge their indolence and vanity; or to shew their exemption from prejudice and their superior wisdom. This is a delusion by which the heart is often betrayed before the understanding is convinced, and will always operate on those who are more attached to the little pride of singularity, than to the generous love of virtue and of truth.

MEN there are of a different description, who partly from nature, prejudice and education, are equally averse to the ordinances of religious worship. They are perhaps calm and contemplative; they can meditate on the being, attributes and providence of the Almighty Father, with as little emotion, and as little interest, as they contemplate the power of gravity, or investigate the laws of motion. The virtues in which they chiefly boast are temperance, chastity, equity and truth. They can form

no idea of those satisfactions in religion, which arise from the union of reason and sensibility. They will rest satisfied with a few speculative truths; and are content to acknowledge that the Deity is EVERY where, without feeling his presence, or adoring him ANY where. The ordinances of worship, therefore, and the comforts of prayer are to them, what the gospel was to the Jews and the Greeks; to the one “a stumbling-block, and to the other foolishness.”

YET this, perhaps, we might treat with some indulgence, if it did not often lead to a sort of supercilious contempt for the practice of others; and if we did not frequently discover a vain effort to magnify a real DEFECT of character into what they please to call superior wisdom, or greatness of mind. But, indeed, there is scarcely a weakness incident to man, which self-love will not endeavour to connect with some degree of excellence. Thus will they often claim
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the highest merit for virtues which they were under no temptation to violate, and think others of no consequence, because they cannot feel their obligation with sufficient force.

OF these various errors we ought to beware; and, I think, we may reasonably suspect the ostentatious claim of superior wisdom, particularly on subjects that regard religion. That mind is truly great which sees its own weakness, and feels its own frailties; and nothing can be a stronger indication of a little mind, than when a man is wholly engrossed with ideas of his own perfection.

RELIGION is a subject which reduces all to the same level, as far as it respects their wants, their helplessness, their hopes and fears. Extravagant pretensions therefore to superiority should always be doubted. After the various boasts of vanity and pride, you will seldom find a man who is

indifferent on any important occasion, to time, and place, and other adventitious circumstances, by which the human mind is affected. And those who make the ridiculous effort to rise so high above the rest of their species generally sink below them. Hence you will often observe, that the man who affects to despise the ordinary helps to devotion, will, in occurrences of much less consequence to his happiness, recur to a variety of expedients to awaken his memory, exercise his passions, or feast his imagination.

YET admitting that there are a few contemplative minds, which need not the general aid of ordinances to enliven their sentiments and support their principles; it should be remembered, that neither civil nor religious institutions were formed for PHILOSOPHERS, but for the BODY of the people; for beings who need instruction and restraint; and who, collectively taken, are more interested by objects that strike
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the senses and animate the passions, than by abstract reasonings, or speculative truths.

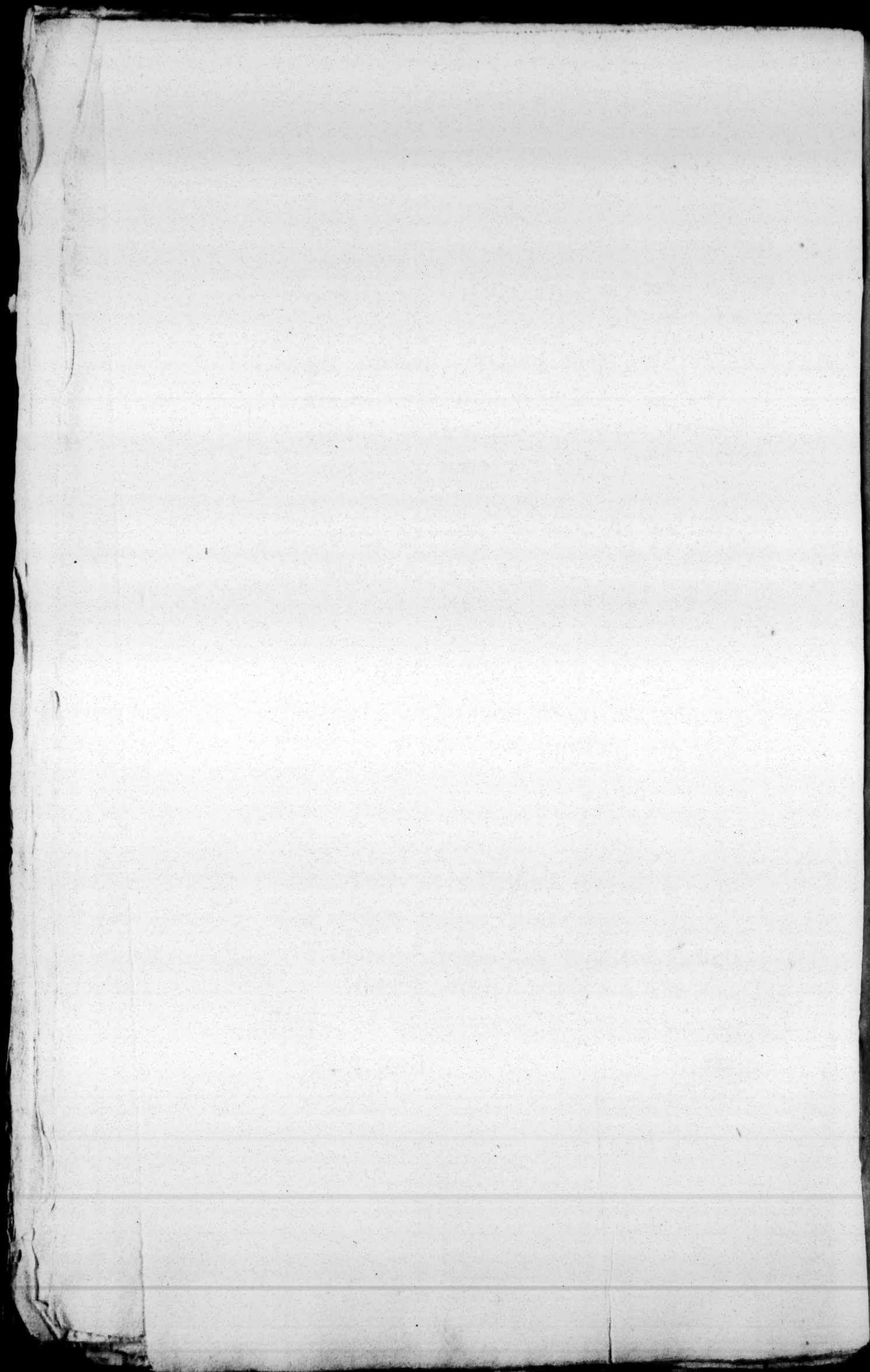
LET these reflections teach us to cultivate that sobriety of mind and moderation of principle, which are the foundation and support of virtue, piety and truth. To whatever duty we direct our attention, we find it in the practice of men branching out into opposite extremes of folly or of vice; we might conclude, therefore, that there must be a middle point, where only its true nature and real excellence can reside.

No one, I hope, will mistake me for the advocate of Superstition, but the truth is that actions have been classed under that odious term which belong not to it; and the name of that malignant spirit which once inflicted vengeance on mankind, is still echoed here to terrify the imagination, though the phantom, with all its horrors, have long since vanished.

DESPISE not the wholesome institutions of men, because they are the institutions of men ; but embrace every circumstance and encourage every opportunity of strengthening your religious principles, and increasing the satisfactions of piety. Guard against that perverse disposition and that frivolous vanity, which may lead some to derive pleasure from contradicting the tenets of others and opposing the establishments of society.

BE assured, that more vice and error arises from the affectation of superior wisdom and virtue, than from the blindest credulity, or the most pitiable weakness. Humility, in its full extent, is one of the most important duties of christianity. When applied to regulate the operations of the mind it becomes, indeed, peculiarly difficult to preserve its nature and its excellence pure and undefiled ; to guard against the encroachments of pride on the one hand, and the abuses of corrupt power on the
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the other. Let us be thankful, however, that neither our faith nor our practice is exposed to the fiery trial of persecution; and that to every sincere christian the means of growing wise unto salvation are sufficiently known. May we all joyfully embrace them; may we omit no opportunity of rendering them effectual; and may the God of all mercies bless our endeavours, through the merits of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. AMEN.



S E R M O N X.

O N P R I D E.

P R O V. XXIX. 23.

A man's pride shall bring him low.

IT is often the fate of those who stray from the paths of duty in pursuit of happiness, to defeat their own views, and to embrace misery, where they hoped to find enjoyment. The gratifications of intemperance soon terminate in pain, in poverty, or disease ; the boast of vanity that aims at greatness, generally provokes contempt ; and that audacious spirit of inquiry, which would extend the bounds of science beyond the
bounds

bounds of the human understanding, is for the most part treated with mortifying neglect, or its efforts considered only as ingenious folly. By the same fixed law in the moral government of the universe we are told, "he that exalteth himself shall be abased;" and that "a man's PRIDE shall bring him low."

IN no single maxim, perhaps, was the wisdom of Solomon more conspicuous than in the present; for PRIDE, though it implies an assumption of superiority, has a manifest tendency to degradation. I shall endeavour to illustrate this important truth by discoursing on the words of the text.

IN the first place, it may be observed, that "a man's PRIDE will bring him low," because it subjects him to the imputation of folly. If his object be the favor of the world, he ought to know that humility is the handmaid that leads to honor; if he promise to himself the blessings of religion, he should remember, that "the High and

“ Lofty One who inhabiteth eternity,
“ dwelleth with him that is of an humble
“ and contrite spirit;” and if he aspire
only to the empty pleasure of self-applause,
he will find that to expect it from PRIDE,
is to rely on a principle that is at once
foolish, vain and impious.

THERE is, indeed, no condition of life,
from the lowest vassal to the monarch on
the throne, that can warrant the indul-
gence of so corrupt a passion. Let it be
imagined, that you are in possession of all
that men are most disposed to envy, covet
and admire;—riches and power, health,
happiness and fame; add also, to crown
the whole, “ a wise and understanding
“ heart.” In the midst of these enjoy-
ments, you have many additional causes
for being thankful to “ the Giver of all
“ good gifts,” but none for being proud.
The solemn and authoritative interrogation
of the holy apostle, “ What hast thou that
“ thou didst not receive?” should teach
us, instead of encouraging an arrogant spi-
rit

rit of superiority over our fellow-creatures, to acknowledge, with grateful piety, our entire submission to the Almighty Father, and our reliance on his mercies for life, for happiness and immortality. If furnished with more extensive powers of being useful, we should consider ourselves still as the subjects of divine providence, and the appointed ministers of good to others. The maxims of human policy teach us, that in proportion to the trust must be the responsibility; and our Lord has assured us, that to "whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required." But the uncertainty and imperfection of every blessing which this world affords, should alone be sufficient to prevent that silly exaltation of the mind which constitutes pride.

It may be unnecessary to enlarge on the instability of riches, and those advantages which are generally supposed to attend them. The subject has been so fully and
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so variously treated by writers of almost every description, and the lesson of humility has been so powerfully taught by the striking history of Job, as to render a farther illustration of it trite and uninteresting. Yet it may be remarked, for the comfort of those whose aspiring wishes may lead them to envy their superiors, and poison the purest sources of contentment in the human breast, that they who are surrounded with abundance, and who, without an effort, can obtain every gratification that wealth affords, are not happier than the rest of their species. The outward splendor of high rank and station may dazzle the eye and captivate the imagination, at a distance, but a nearer approach would dissolve the charm, and discover the envied idol surrounded with almost every care and every sorrow that besets the meanest of his fellow-creatures. Enemies might persecute him and friends prove false; in the moment of enjoyment pain and disease might overtake him; in the day, he might indulge the triumphant pride of his heart;

and “eat, drink and be merry ;” in the the night “his soul may be required of “him.”

EXPOSED to so many evils and subject to such vicissitudes of fortune, may we not well say that “pride is not made for man,” and pity the folly of one, who, in the language of scripture, is ever ready to pronounce, “I am rich and increased with “goods, and have need of nothing ; and “knows not that he is,” or at least that he MAY be, “wretched, and miserable, and “poor, and blind and naked.”

NOR are any superior endowments of the mind a sufficient justification for Pride. With the active powers of imagination, thought and reflection, are generally connected a lively sensibility, that often increases the sorrows of life without multiplying its comforts in any just proportion, and a melancholy discontent, that suffers many objects of delight to others to pass away without regard. On minds that are so constituted

tuted as to merit our love and admiration, the pangs of disappointment will sometimes fasten with unremitting anguish, or the agitations of some boundless desire dwell with increasing misery. It is their fate to encounter woes of which the generality can form no idea, and which they therefore treat with derision or neglect. The misfortunes "that pierce some through
"with many sorrows," will scarcely annoy the peace, or interrupt the gratifications of others; as the keen blast that withers the tender plant and opening flower, blows on the sturdy oak without producing the slightest injury.

YET the advantages of education and the flattering distinctions of nature, may be ranked among the most valuable and permanent blessings of our present condition; and there are few, perhaps, who would barter that superiority which a strong and cultivated mind possesses over the ignorant and weak, for any other distinction whatever. But yet neither the acquisition of

fame, the flatteries of self-love, nor the consciousness of distinguished merit, should swell the heart with arrogance or Pride. The truest characteristics of superior greatness and superior wisdom, are modesty and humility; modesty freed from false shame, and humility without abasement.

AND has not the most exalted mortal on earth sufficient cause to cultivate this lowliness of mind? Is there an eminence, is there a retreat where the shaft of adversity cannot reach him? It is not the wreck of fortune only, the loss of honors and of fame that he might deplore. These are the feeble outworks of our happiness. Man is often attacked in his strongest holds. Disease may chain him to the bed of pain; death may take from him those for whom he chiefly wished to live; and, to mention the last and most humiliating species of human woe, the eye that now sparkles with intelligence and sensibility, or diffuses the mild lustre of a benevolent heart, may be fixed in the unmeaning stare of idiocy, or
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express the wild horrors of madness ; while the brain, that was once the seat of science and of every fond remembrance, crowded with frightful images, and raving at phantoms of its own creation, might easily suggest the idea, that the spirit of a daemon agitated the form of a man.

IF none of the motives which have been already considered are sufficient to warrant the indulgence of Pride, much less ought it to arise from the casual distinction of rank in the different orders of men. By the superintending care of the Almighty, human society is so constituted, that the whole, doubtless, “worketh together for good.” All have their different stations allotted them, and may contribute, more or less, to the general welfare ; though if we regard public utility, and the rational comforts of life, we shall deem those of least importance perhaps, who are notwithstanding most apt to be proud of their rank.

WERE you called on to blot out of the catalogue of human society certain classes of men, who might appear to be of the least benefit to it, your judgment would fix on those, who arrogate to themselves the greatest importance. You would not diminish the industrious husbandman, the fair trader, or the useful artizan; but you would banish the lazy tribe of wealthy epicures, the pompous slaves of fashion, that live on the labors of others, and the numerous train of selfish worldlings, that follow only where ambition and the thirst of power lead them.

BUT yet we do not find that Pride is confined to any particular rank or station. It is as frequently the vice of poverty perhaps as riches; and if it often disgraces superior talents, yet still oftener it serves to render ignorance contemptible. Hence it appears, that it does not depend on any external, or adventitious circumstances, so much as on some rooted evil of the mind. But from whatever cause it proceeds, it always betokens weakness, folly and corruption.

ruption. Of this however we shall be more fully assured, if we consider the various evils, and the general depravity it produces.

It is not in a limited sense that we may say "a man's Pride shall bring him low;" the truth of the assertion will appear in almost every point of view. It is often verified in a species of degradation which we frequently behold, and which men in general chiefly dread; I mean *POVERTY*. Take a view of human society as far as your own knowledge extends, and you will find, that more have sunk into the wretched state of indigent dependence, or are now involving themselves in the greatest difficulties, from the indulgence of Pride, than from any other cause. The unavoidable calamities of life are really few, when compared with those which spring from vice and folly. When blessed with an ample competency, how often do we see men, instead of enjoying the bounties of divine providence with thankfulness, vying with their superiors,

or such equals as are as foolish as themselves, in mere ostentation and parade. For a splendid mansion, a numerous retinue, and the vanities of fashion, the rational comforts of life are often sacrificed, and an innocent offspring sometimes exposed to the wide world, that were bred in PRIDE, and left in POVERTY.

RUIN, indeed, is not always the consequence of this vicious passion ; but it seldom fails of producing evils, which, in a moral sense, are still worse. From indulging in a thousand idle expences, in order to support a kind of pompous vanity, the proud man can seldom spare a charitable mite "to give to him that needeth." The source of every generous virtue is poisoned, and the obligations of common justice violated through this corrupt principle. Many will embark in such projects of hazardous ambition, as might destroy the peace of whole families, in case of failure, and all to gratify the vain desire of making a more ostentatious appearance in the world. From
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the same cause the poor, also, are often oppressed, instead of being supported and relieved; and though the vulgar may be caught with the dazzling splendor that surrounds the proud man's dwelling, yet if they were admitted within, they would frequently be disgusted with scenes of idle wretchedness, or acts of meanness and oppression.

PRIDE also is the source of continual mortification; of outrages that admit of no redress, and sufferings that excite no pity. That sorrow which is blended with the tender sentiments of friendship and affection, will ever be treated with compassionate regard; and we reverence the misery which sometimes awaits the virtuous, because we consider it as the needful chastisement of heaven. But the petty vexations of Pride, that are compounded with every vain, selfish and malignant passion, have no claim to our indulgence. Here, on the contrary, we can see the shafts of ridicule fly without censure; the native dignity of virtue

might here spurn with indignation; and even the mild spirit of the gospel will permit us to exclaim, thou fool, "who
"maketh thee to differ from another?"

FARTHER, it may be remarked, I think, with the greatest truth, that pride is more frequently productive of quarrels, bitterness and strife, than any other cause. So fully, indeed, was Solomon convinced of this, and he well knew the human heart, that he asserts, with peculiar force of expression, "Only by PRIDE cometh contention."

WITHOUT attending to its operations in fomenting the hostile enmity of whole nations, or increasing the turbulence of ambition, let us attend to its influence on the happiness of private life. If you have mixed much with your fellow-creatures, if you have known many of them intimately, and not always seen them either at a distance, or in a croud, you will lament, perhaps, that there should not be
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more real comfort and satisfaction in connections that ought to be the most endearing, and dependencies that are, of all others, the most interesting, natural and necessary. And what is it that so often poisons the well-spring of happiness, where every rational observer might expect it to flow with a pure and abundant stream? Examine nearly, and you will very frequently find, that it is nothing but PRIDE,

THIS base and selfish passion always creates, and always keeps alive, a watchful and incessant jealousy of power. Hence the mildest exhortation, and the most friendly remonstrance, is often converted into the bitterness of accusation, or the insolence of reproach; every trifling omission is construed into wilful neglect, and every unguarded expression is thought to proceed from an intention to mortify or enrage. Between those who are in a state of mutual dependence on each other for almost every comfort, what mischief and what misery does not such a temper cause!

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Form in your imagination an estimate of all the ills that flow from poverty, from sickness and misfortune, and they will not bear any proportion to the repeated miseries that spring from irritable passions, and the violent hostilities of Pride.

BUT would you see this odious vice surrounded with all its terrors and in the darkest point of view, observe the awful end of the desperate Suicide. The dreadful act of self-destruction is often committed in the evil moment of wounded Pride, or mortified ambition. While thousands are suffering, in patient sorrow, painfulness and hunger, cold and nakedness, the proud wretch will be guilty of "the sin that is never to be repented of," merely because he might be forced, perhaps, from his own folly, to lay aside some unnecessary pomp, and sink beneath the level of those who were once his equals,

YET it would neither be charitable nor just, always to impute such a crime to motives

tives so foolish and corrupt. The minds of some are prone to despondency and sorrow. The few satisfactions they enjoy, perhaps, are neither contaminated with principles of Pride, selfishness or ambition; and when they look abroad for happiness, they pursue it, not like sentimental epicures, or as the glutton does his food, but generally rest it all on some darling hope. Should they be disappointed, the evil "spirit of melancholy" seizes on the whole soul; all enjoyment is shut out, or converted into food for misery. The faculties of memory, of reason and reflection, instead of calming, heighten the disorder. As the painful activity of thought increases, the power of determining is lost; and soon, for want of that "anchor of the soul," which religion only can supply, the sorrowing wretch deplores not only the POWER, but even the EFFORT to act as he ought. A weight of complicated woe, therefore, is fastened on the mind, and a mortal sadness ensues, that is cherished by solitude and irritated by society; at length even a change of suffering becomes

becomes desirable, and eternal death is thought a blessing. Thus he rushes into the grave, and we view the melancholy issue of his days, that were perhaps, "few and evil," with pity and with terror. Even the law charitably withholds its censures, and while we publicly proclaim the phrensy of the lunatic, we privately feel for the sorrows of the man.

WITH the presumptuous sin of suicide we may rank the odious vice of duelling. The provocation, or the injury which would lead a wise and good man, not to prostitute the name of a christian, to expose himself to the awful hazard of losing his own life, or shedding the blood of a fellow-creature, must, one should suppose, be aggravating beyond measure, and deep beyond redress; nothing, one might imagine, less than the ruin and corruption of those who were most dear to us, the utter loss of reputation, or the danger of life, could plead in excuse for the commission of such a desperate crime. But attend to the history

tory of duels, and you will find that not one in ten arises from either of these motives. It is from outraged Pride; from a species of false honor that is more allied to vice than virtue, and that is wounded only by the worldling's sneer, and the dread of partial infamy, that men meet each other prepared for death. From the most trifling provocations, and the slightest affronts, even cowards are sometimes forced into what is called the lists of honor; and often while the heart is agitated with the most degenerate fear, though forced to an ostentatious display of courage, such a farce of manhood is performed, as might induce even children to smile with pity and contempt.

AFTER this representation of the causes and effects of Pride, it is scarcely necessary to add, that it must be incompatible with almost every christian virtue. It is in vain to point out the various evils that attend it, since it blends itself with almost every passion and increases every infirmity. It is a
source

source of the strongest delusion, and equally disqualifies us, perhaps, for knowing our real duty towards God, our neighbour and ourselves.

THE proud man sits on an imaginary eminence of his own erection, and propagates servility or wretchedness all around him. The chief virtues of humanity require too much condescension for him to practise ; and so far is he from being capable of contributing to the happiness of his fellow-creatures, that he often insults the misery which springs from his own conduct, and despises the meanness which he himself creates.

So blind, also, does his predominant passion render him to his own defects, that though in the fulness of his heart he is almost proud enough to say, “ Who is the “ Lord ? ” yet, perhaps, he will think that no exhortation to humility, no precept of religion or morality applies to him ; his Pride is sanctified by its alliance to virtue ;

true; his is not that base passion which is vicious and corrupt, but personal dignity, exalted honor, or independent spirit. In a mind thus bewildered and deceived, the first principle of improvement is wanting; for he who is not conscious of defect, can have no sufficient motive for amendment; and this is an evil that will extend itself to all the proud man's passions and pursuits.

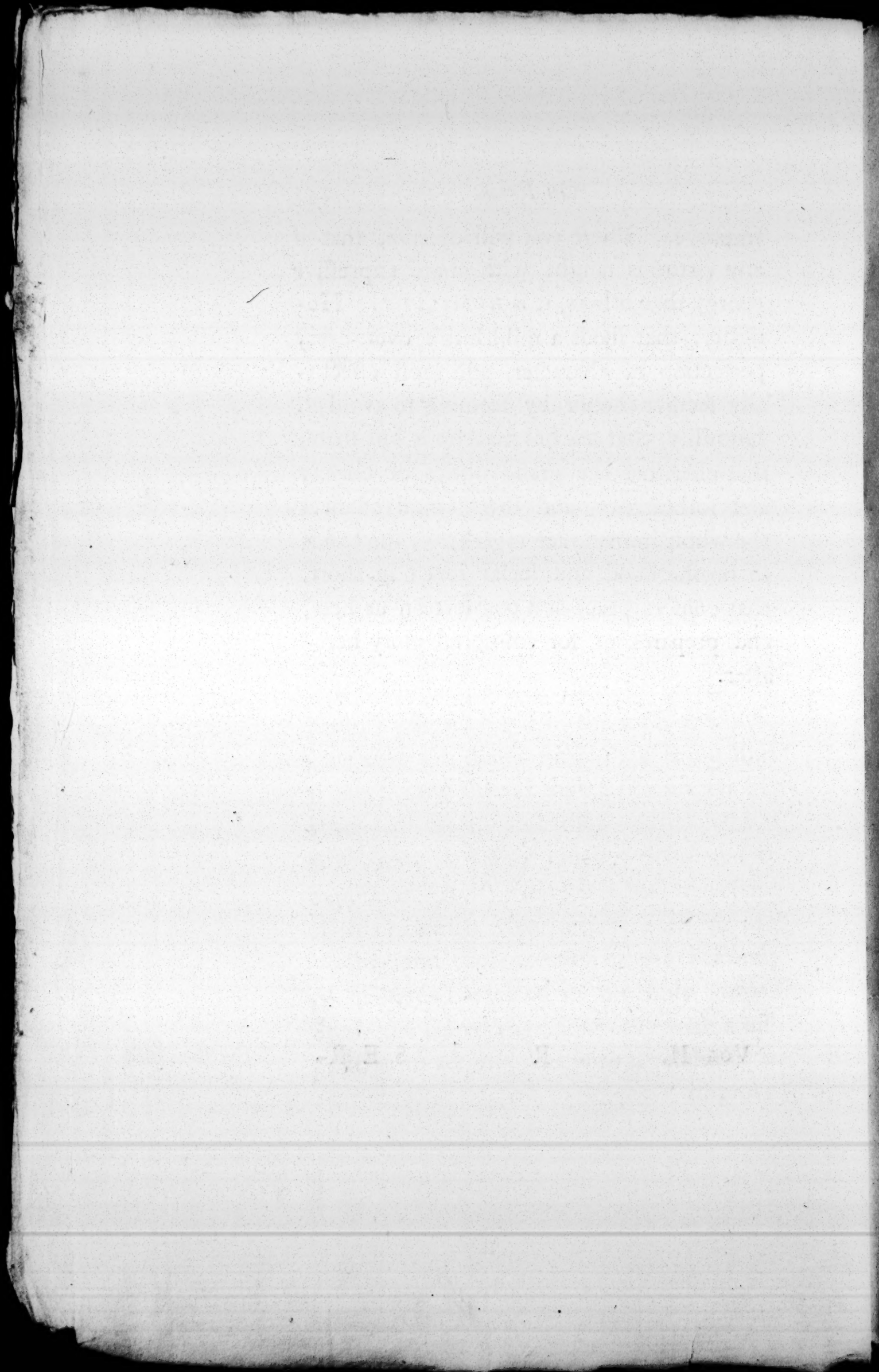
BUT Pride never appears so sinful and offensive, as when we consider man in relation to his Maker. Then we perceive it destroying the efficacy, and poisoning the very source of all those virtues which he is chiefly bound to practise. For a frail child of dust that has but a short time to live, that is running the race that is set before him, and whose first care ought to be "to make his calling and election sure;" that one who is dependent on the God of all mercies for every moment of his existence, and, in a state of civilized society, indebted to his fellow-creatures for almost every comfort he enjoys; that such a being,

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should be so inflated with Pride, as to forget the most essential duties of life, is, however common, one of the most melancholy proofs of human weakness and depravity.

THE proud man, therefore, who is at once his own worshipper and idol, is in reality always degraded, in proportion as he thinks himself exalted. Hence our blessed Lord said to his disciples “who-
“soever will be great among you, shall
“be your minister; and whosoever of you
“will be the chiefest, shall be servant of
“all.” So true is it in the most extensive sense that “a man’s Pride shall bring him
“low;” and that as soon as he forgets his dependent state, and those duties which flow from it, he is lost to virtue and to happiness. As the only effectual corrective of this extensive vice, attend both to the practice and the precepts of the heavenly Messiah, as contained in his holy gospel. Study the sacred page, not only with a disposition to admire, but with a resolution to improve.

improve. There you will observe, that if any virtue is taught with more expressive energy than others, it is HUMILITY. Humility, that sheds a mild lustre over every perfection of character, and most effectually secures honor by seeming to avoid it. Humility, that teaches man he is but man; that cherishes the grand duties of charity and forbearance, and that would connect the whole human race together in the bands of brotherhood and social love; in short, that confers peace and comfort on us here, and prepares us for immortal glory hereafter.



S E R M O N XI.

ON BENEFICENCE.

G A L. vi. 10.

As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.

TH E most distinguishing feature of christianity, in a moral point of view, is universal benevolence. “Peace on earth, and good-will towards men,” was the glorious annunciation of the heavenly host, on our blessed Lord’s nativity; and agreeably to these glad tidings, when he entered on his divine ministry, we read

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in the simple, but expressive language of scripture, "he went about doing good."

MEN of the most discordant principles and hostile dispositions shared his benevolence and received his blessing. His readiness to comfort the wretched and instruct the ignorant; his labor of love in reclaiming sinners, and healing the diseases of every denomination of men, whether Pharisees, Sadducees, Publicans, or Samaritans, gave the world an illustrious proof that his charity was not contracted within the narrow bounds of human virtue, but was in every respect worthy of the all-gracious Father, whose love is perfect, and whose will he came to teach.

IN imitation of his glorious example we also are taught to do good on the most disinterested and extensive principle. On proper occasions our benevolence must break through the partial ties of kindred, country and friendship, and embrace all within its ample bounds;—even our enemies; nor
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are we "to grow weary in well-doing," but with every opportunity of beneficence unite the practice of it.

YET the God of mercies enjoins not any thing as a duty, which will not ultimately promote our happiness; and even in the present state of things, human nature is not so depraved, the divine image of the Creator is not so entirely defaced, but that the soul of man can feel the pleasure and delight of GOODNESS. We may regard this, indeed, as a feeble emanation from the source of all perfection, and as the surest token of our relation to beings of superior wisdom and superior virtue. Cherish it, therefore, as a guide to the purest felicity, and as a jewel that will shine with distinguished lustre in the crown of immortality. Even in this life, if we assemble in our imagination all the pleasures that are derived from sense, from vanity and pride, from the successful pursuits of ambition, or the envied possession of power; we shall find none so permanent and pure as those

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which attend a benevolent spirit in the exercise of its goodness.

THERE are many pleasures that proceed from a corrupt source; and the gratifications of some are immediately connected with the sufferings of others. As the mind improves in virtue, or as the ardor of passion abates, what was once our glory might become our shame; and the same reflection that demonstrates our folly might aggravate our remorse. But in the satisfactions of christian benevolence, there is nothing that can endanger or deceive us; all is gracious, sanctified and holy; it forms no small portion of "that joy which no man taketh from us;" it will cheer the soul with the most grateful remembrance in scenes of sickness and of sorrow, and at the awful hour of death will go up "with our alms and our prayers for a memorial before God." "As we have, therefore, opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."

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THE holy apostle knew that the power of human beings is circumscribed within a very narrow circle, and left his divine precept under proper limitations. The liberal spirit of christian charity is not, indeed, on every occasion, to be confined to the formality of rules: "As we have opportunity, we are required to do good unto ALL men;" but as our benevolence can reach only a few of the infinite number that need comfort and support, some discrimination was necessary; and therefore, when other grounds of preference were wanting, we are called on "to do good especially unto them who are of the household of faith." This distinction was the more necessary in the apostle's time, for then christians had none but christians to relieve them. Jews and Gentiles of every denomination, however hostile in other respects, united in persecuting and despising the little flock who professed themselves to be the disciples of Jesus. Yet to protect themselves, they united together in such strict bands of brotherhood and union, that they "were of

“ one heart and one soul ; neither said any
“ of them,” continues the evangelist,
“ that ought of the things which he possessed, was his own, but they had all
“ things common.”

THIS cannot but give us the most exalted idea of their disinterested friendship and affection ; it was a mark also of that divine prudence which taught them to be “ as
“ wise as serpents and as harmless as
“ doves.” But as the situation of christians is now widely different, such a determination cannot be required of us, because it is no longer necessary nor practicable. Instead therefore of making any vain attempt to equalize the conditions of men, we are called upon “ to do good as often
“ as we have opportunity ;” and, amidst the variety of unhappy objects that might claim our benevolence, to settle some just principles of rendering it as efficacious, and as extensively useful as possible.

THE

THE limitation of the precept is as necessary as the precept itself. Universal beneficence is the attribute of the Deity. The charity of man is bounded by a small portion of time and space, and a still less extension of power. If his light shine in the world, it shines but for a short period, and can only warm a few. It no more resembles that love which is perfect, than the glow-worm's fire resembles the flood of light that issues from the sun. It might be considered as the small rivulet which fertilizes and adorns a valley, but which would be absorbed and lost, if conducted over extensive plains and barren wastes.

IT behoves us, therefore, to husband well the little time and power we have, that the benevolent intentions of the heart might not be frustrated, and that no good deed, if possible, might be without effect. From romantic and erroneous notions of generosity and benevolence, many are lavishing, to no good purpose, such sums as would,
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if properly applied, not only “ feed the
“ hungry and clothe the naked,” but re-
claim the vicious and succour the distressed.
The principles of such charity are often
corrupted by pride and ostentation. Men
also there are, who will indulge the vanity
of GIVING to some, what others have a
right to CLAIM ; and aspire to the reputa-
tion of being generous and humane, when
their only object, perhaps, is to be ad-
mired.

BUT this is widely different from the
pure spirit of christian charity ; and if we
wish to fulfil its precepts, we should study
above all things “ to keep ourselves un-
“ spotted from the world.” We should
gladly prefer the single satisfaction of doing
good in private, to the vain ambition of
shining in public. The offerings of bene-
volence should be recommended by the sa-
crifice of vanity and selfishness, under all its
disguises. While we relieve the wants and
sooth the sorrows of our fellow-creatures,
we should not exhibit any of those passions
which

which often lead to both ; but rather shew them, by example, that our charity is perfectly consistent with the duties of justice and humility, as well as the love of order, temperance and peace. Thus should we silently, perhaps, communicate the principles of virtue and of happiness, while we stretched out our hands to relieve temporary distress.

OTHERS there are, who seem to amuse their imaginations with ideas of universal benevolence and liberality, as writers have done with the fabulous beings of Greek mythology, or the delights of the golden age. It is a subject that appears to interest sensibility and warm the heart ; but it is indulged rather to make them fancifully eloquent than practically good ; rather as an opportunity of self-applause, than as the means of benefiting others.

HENCE we find some speak with rapture of the exquisite joys of sensibility, and the delightful satisfactions of friendship, who
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are seldom engaged in performing any real acts of goodness. Their language and their sentiments are often the mere echoes of others, and their notions of the amiable duties are little more than the delusions of imagination. There are characters, I am assured, whose pity is more frequently excited by the fictitious woes of the theatre, than the scenes of real life ; and whose benevolence is warmed only by the images of poetry, or the hyperbolical miseries of a romance.

OTHERS there are, in whose souls the ardor of benevolence blends itself with every passion and pursuit. Conscious that the generous impulse is allied to virtue and to happiness, they wait not for the decisions of reason, or the distinctions of prudence, but yield to its influence wherever they behold the miseries of poverty, and hear the complaints of sorrow. Not content to bestow with discretion, they give with lavish and indiscriminate bounty. Hence they are often deceived by the shameful importunities of the vicious and the idle, or disgusted

gusted with ingratitude and hypocrisy which they themselves encouraged. Nor is this all. The source of benevolence that might have run through life with an increasing stream, is often exhausted, when the most worthy, perhaps, are thirsting for its blessings; or, what is worse, poisoned for ever with suspicion and distrust. Yet excess of virtue is always entitled to our praise; and though such benevolent characters may not be equal to that good and faithful servant, who so husbanded his talent, as to increase it to ten, yet they may rank with him who improved it to five; and like him, it is hoped, “will enter into the joy
“ of their Lord.”

BUT those who wish, “as they have opportunity, to do good unto all men,” should regulate their conduct by those rules and that attention to order, which are necessary for the best of human beings. In the first place, we should endeavour to form a proper estimate of our power to do
good.

good. There are few who could not spare something from their needless expences and selfish enjoyments, "to give to him that needeth." The language of scripture, indeed, makes no exception to the grand duty of christian charity. "Be merciful after thy power," is the universal precept: "If thou hast much, give plentifully; if thou hast little, do thy diligence gladly to give of that little; for so gatherest thou thyself a good reward in the day of necessity."

IN order to render this important duty constant and habitual, we should form some plan of charity adapted to our peculiar situation and circumstances. That which we determine to spare from our imaginary wants, or our superfluous expences, we should regularly set apart for the poor and needy, as an offering the most acceptable to the Father of mercies. This was the express direction of St. Paul to the Corinthians. "Upon the first day
" of

“ of the week,” says he, “ let every one of
“ you lay by him in store, as God hath
“ prospered him.”

WHEN we have thus devoted a portion of our substance to the wants of others, we should next diligently enquire out such objects as have the highest claim to our beneficence. The act of giving is by no means the only, or most important part of christian charity. By scattering with a lavish hand, we may, indeed, discover a bountiful heart, and occasionally do some good ; but it should be remembered, also, that the actions of random benevolence often do harm ; I mean particularly to the unworthy objects of it ; but the WILL of the benefactor shall be taken for the DEED ; and in this sense, more especially, we may say, “ it is more blessed to give than to receive.” When, therefore, we indulge our benevolence, let us “ add to our virtue knowledge,” and endeavour to obtain the merit of wisdom,
while

while we hope for the rewards of charity. The seed surely should not be cast among brambles, or thrown carelessly by the way side, while there is so much good ground ready to receive it, and where there is a fair prospect of its growing up to perfection.

LET us, therefore, carefully distinguish between the seeming objects of our charity. Those who obtrude themselves foremost on our notice have not often the first claim to pity or protection. There is an ingenuous shame, a silent suffering, and a meekness of spirit attending the afflictions of the virtuous, that render them averse to importunate complaints, and public demonstrations of misery. If, therefore, we wish to DO good, as well as INTEND it, we must often desire access to the habitations of the wretched. We must sometimes disregard the cry that is echoed in public, till we have heard the sigh that is breathed in private.

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COULD we but acquire some portion of that divine benevolence which is not gratified with mere almsgiving ; with scanty portions lavished occasionally as the impulse of pity suggests, but which induced our blessed Lord “ to go about from house to house and village to village doing good,” how many sufferers might we discover in this metropolis, whose complaints never reached the ears of the benevolent, but whose sorrows are dignified by virtue. Not too proud to be PROPERLY relieved, though above the practices of common mendicants ; happy to be distinguished, though not the most forward in claiming notice, they often pass through scenes of painfulness and hunger, sickness and disease, unpitied and unknown. The scattered rays of benevolence that shoot around reach not them. They sit in helpless misery, like the poor cripple in the porch at Siloam, while others are at all times ready “ to step in before them.” Though possessing the strongest claims to compassion, they are often withheld

from complaining by shame, or fear, the dread of unkindness and suspicion, or the mortification of a repulse. These are the objects which it is our duty to seek for; and the labor of love in FINDING them is almost equal to the merit of RELIEVING them.

It is true we cannot relieve all, but yet we should remember that if every one properly discharged his duty, all would be relieved. Let us, therefore, act individually as we ought. In the present state of human society, charity has continual opportunities of doing good; but in proportion as the claims of the wretched multiply, the necessity also of prudent discrimination increases. We should at all times distinguish the sufferings of vice from the misfortunes of virtue; the miseries of idleness and sensuality from the distresses of honest poverty, and the awful visitations of providence.

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WE should in some degree also attend to the peculiar wants and the necessary comforts of those who are in different stations; and, where there are not other motives of preference, we cannot do better than dispense our bounty especially to those around us; whose lives and conversation, as well as their misfortunes, are known to us; who are subject to the same laws, who profess the same religion, and therefore may be considered “of the household of faith.”

BUT we must be careful not to confine the duty of charity to mere giving. The degree of pecuniary aid which some can afford is, indeed, considerable; and may be made the instrument of good to many: others can furnish but a scanty pittance; by no means proportioned to their own wishes, or the wants of their fellow-creatures. Yet they are perhaps eminently qualified, in other respects, for practising the charity of christians; they can

instruct the ignorant, comfort the afflicted, warn the inexperienced and reclaim the vicious.

IN all ranks and stations such is the helplessness of man, when singly considered, and so various are his wants, that the meanest of his fellow-creatures might occasionally contribute to his pleasures and relieve his distresses. These are offices which ought to be performed, when almsgiving may be neither practicable nor necessary.

IN every situation of life, whether rich or poor, the strong, in every sense of the expression, should help to bear the infirmities of the weak. Some occasional sacrifice of time in watching over the sick; some attention to trifling concerns, when great ones are not within our power; the tender assiduities of friendship in distress, and the seasonable communication of advice in the hour of perplexity, are all acts of
charity

charity that are often as acceptable as the rich man's offering, and perhaps more pleasing in the sight of God.

THE interests of charity would be farther promoted by pointing out the means of doing good to others, and by faithfully executing every trust and office in which we are concerned ourselves. A living example has shewn what a single man can do towards the comfort and reformation of the most wretched portion of the human species. By visiting the sickly chambers of the Lazaretto, the debtor's gloomy prison, and the felon's loathsome cell, he HAS been, or it is hoped WILL be, the means of introducing, at least, the blessings of health and cleanliness to thousands, and banishing the horrid vices of drunkenness, extortion and rapacity from scenes, where the wretched have none to help them, and where the light of benevolence before had scarcely ever dawned.

FEW, indeed, are furnished with opportunities of such extensive charity ; but yet were every individual to exert himself within the circle of his own authority ; were every manager, steward and trustee to fulfil the important duties entrusted to him, and see that the pious donations of our fore-fathers were not abused ; were the numerous schools that have been instituted chiefly for the benefit of the poor, managed with diligence and fidelity ; were the immense treasures of our corporate bodies applied to the necessities of their indigent brethren, as their liberal donors intended, and not squandered away to the disgrace of human nature, in the refinements of luxury, in gluttony and drunkenness ; were those parochial offices, also, which particularly regard the poor of our own neighbourhood, or as it were of our own household, always conferred on proper persons ; were they accepted in rotation with chearfulness, and discharged not only with integrity, but with kindness, circumspection and activity, the

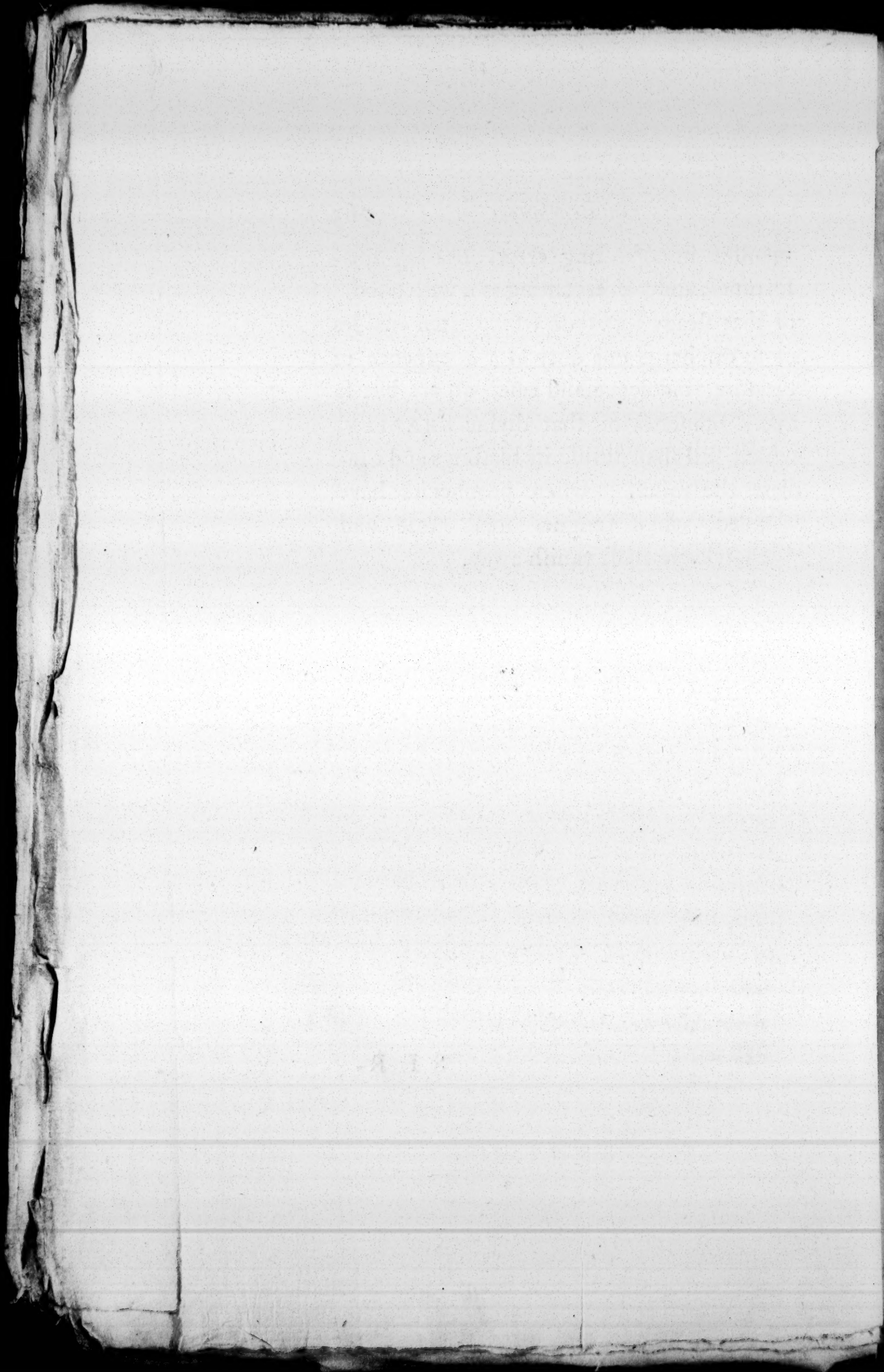
the sun of benevolence would shine around us with redoubled lustre; thousands would not only see, but feel our good works, and learn “to glorify our Father which is in heaven.” Then we might reasonably expect, that the beautiful prospect of the Psalmist would be realized; we might hope that the happy period would gradually arrive, when “our
“ sons shall grow up as the young plants,
“ and our daughters be as the polished
“ corners of the temple, that are at once
“ an ornament and support; when there
“ shall be no breaking in nor going out;
“ no leading into captivity, and no com-
“ plaining in our streets.”

LET us be aware, therefore, lest we circumscribe the great virtue of christian charity within the narrow bounds of almsgiving, or the tardy relief of testamentary bequests. Its divine influence is as extensive and beneficial in the intellectual world as light and heat are through the works of nature. If you are not qua-

lified for some of its more splendid offices, doubtless you are for many of its humbler duties. We are only required "to do good as we have opportunity." Whether we cheerfully embrace the many opportunities that offer, or seek and improve them with diligence, must be left, after every warning of experience and every discussion of reason, to our own consciences, and that awful Power "to whom all hearts are open, and from whom no secrets are hidden."

THAT we might not be deceived by the vanities of self-love, let us remember that as charity is of all other duties the most comprehensive, so is it by far the most important. Every virtue, indeed, that tends to promote the happiness and welfare of others, every good and generous deed, whether it springs from that unshaken integrity which is necessary to check the torrent of corruption, that patient gentleness which is chiefly made
manifest

manifest in correcting error, healing misfortunes, and “overcoming evil with good,” or that steady fortitude which often enables us to discharge our duty at the expence of pleasure, indolence and ease, all are but so many branches of that divine CHARITY, which still shall diffuse its blessings and irradiate the mind, “when prophecies have failed, when tongues shall cease and knowledge shall vanish away.”



S E R M O N XIII.

ON THE CHARACTER AND CONDUCT
OF ZACCHEUS.

L U K E xix. 4.

*And he ran before, and climbed up into a
sycamore-tree to see him.*

THE Saviour of the world, having performed a miracle of love in restoring sight to a poor blind beggar, near Jericho, was followed by a numerous concourse of people, as he passed through that city, who “gave praise unto God” for what they had seen and heard. Among the number who wished to behold the Son
of

of God, was Zaccheus, “ the chief among
“ the publicans, who,” as St. Luke in-
forms us, “ was rich.” Being little of
stature, and not able to gratify his desire
for the croud, the evangelist relates, that
“ He ran before, and climbed up into a
“ sycamore-tree, to see him ; for he was
“ to pass that way. And when Jesus came
“ to the place, he looked up, and saw
“ him, and said unto him, Zaccheus, make
“ haste and come down ; for to-day I must
“ abide at thy house. And he made haste,
“ and came down, and received him joy-
“ fully. And when they saw it, they all
“ murmured, saying, that he was gone to
“ be a guest with a man that is a sinner.
“ And Zaccheus stood, and said unto the
“ Lord, Behold, Lord, the half of my
“ goods I give to the poor ; and if I have
“ taken any thing from any man, by false
“ accusation, I restore him four-fold.”

IN discoursing on this part of the gospel-
history, it may not be improper to say a
few words, by way of illustration, on the
office,

office, or employment of Zaccheus, as “the chief among the publicans.” Some observations, also, on his character and conduct, as represented in the context, may not be unprofitable, and to these I shall subjoin a few remarks on the kind and gracious demeanor of our blessed Lord, on this occasion, interspersed with such reflections as the subject might suggest.

THE publicans were officers appointed by the Romans to collect the taxes and imposts of the empire. These duties were of different kinds. Some were levied under the name of tribute from particular districts of country, and paid regularly in such sums as the government required. Others were of a fluctuating and uncertain nature, varying with the exigencies of the state, and becoming more or less oppressive to the subject, in proportion to the fraud and extortion, or the honor and integrity, of the collectors.

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IN a business of such importance and extent as that of levying the taxes of the Roman empire, the officers must have been numerous and of various denominations. We learn from history, that whole provinces were often farmed by individuals ; but these were generally citizens of Rome and of equestrian, or senatorial dignity, who transferred the laborious office of collecting to such deputies as were likely to render it most productive.

THE persons fixed on for this purpose were frequently natives of the respective provinces which their employers farmed, as being best acquainted with the trade, produce, language and customs of their own country. Of this description of publicans it is probable Zaccheus was, since his name shews that he was of Jewish extraction, and our Lord calls him " the son of Abraham."

As he was the chief among the revenue-officers in Judea, he might, indeed, have been

been the immediate servant of the empire, and subject only to the jurisdiction of the *Questors*; or, which is more probable, rented the taxes of his country, at an advanced price, from some person of consequence, who resided in, or near the metropolis, and enjoyed his post as a mere *finecure*, or *donative* from the emperor.

THE OFFICE of publican was, on various accounts, extremely odious to the provincials, and this could not fail of rendering the CHARACTER so. Who, indeed, that had the least share of independence, could view, the destructive ambition and ferocious pride of the Roman people without abhorrence? Who, that had any sense of natural justice, could endure to see the resources of their country drained, their commerce obstructed and their industry laid under contribution, in order to support the power, and administer to the luxury of those general destroyers? The very sight of a publican must naturally awake in the mind of every tributary subject, the painful remembrance

brance of the privileges which they once enjoyed, and rouse the spirit of indignation against the cruelty and oppression of their imperious masters.

BUT not to mention other causes of disgust towards the publicans, as the odious instruments of Roman power, the avarice and rapacity, the cruelty and extortion of these petty tyrants were sufficient. So general and notorious was their corruption and abuse of power, that heathen writers commonly bestow on them the opprobrious epithets of THIEVES and ROBBERS; and in the holy gospel "PUBLICANS and SINNERS" are so invariably united, that they appear to be synonymous terms.

To this general depravity of character, however, we may fairly conclude, that Zaccheus was an exception. He gave the half of his goods to the poor, and if in discharging the duties of his office, he had been guilty of any injustice, or oppression, he made a four-fold restitution; which was all that the Jewish law required.

WE may observe, also, in his behalf, that from the nature of his situation, he might have been sometimes led to make illegal and oppressive exactions without being sensible of his error. He might have been deceived by the partial and malicious accounts of others. When we consider the horrid abuses of the times, and the corrupt manner in which justice was administered throughout the world, but more particularly in Judea, we can readily imagine, that this honest publican might have been imposed upon by the misrepresentations of his inferior officers, (of which he must have had many) and as a conscientious man he thought himself, in some measure responsible, perhaps, for THEIR conduct.

BUT what serves greatly to fix a just estimation on the character of Zaccheus was his behaviour towards our blessed Lord and Saviour. He climbed up into a sycamore-tree to see him pass by; and when distinguished from the croud by the Son

of God, “ he made haste and came down
“ and received him joyfully.” Doubtless
he had heard of the miracles and preaching
of our blessed Lord ; he had been told that
the Messiah was come, and that the will
of God was made manifest “ in the beau-
“ of holiness.”

WHILE some endeavoured to discredit
these divine truths, and others from their
crimes were afraid that life and immor-
tality should be brought to light through
the gospel ; while the minds of many were
fettered with obstinate prejudices, and more,
perhaps, wholly devoted to the interests of
this world, Zaccheus, with a rational ad-
miration, hastened to see the heavenly “ au-
“ thor of our salvation,” and certainly
was prepared to “ hear the word with
“ joy.”

WHAT must have been his feelings
when our Lord thought proper, from the
suggestions of that divine wisdom which
enabled him to see through the human
heart,

heart, to address him thus ! “ Zaccheus, “ make haste and come down ; for to-day “ I must abide at thy house.” Probably not any honor from the Roman governor, nor any distinction from Herod, the king, would have given him half the pleasure and satisfaction. We are only told, indeed, with the usual simplicity of scripture language, that “ he made haste and came “ down, and received him joyfully ;” but from the circumstances of the history we may suppose the rest.

THIS good man’s happiness, however, in having the blessed opportunity of entertaining our Lord under his roof, was embittered by the illiberal prejudices of the Jews. He knew that as a Publican he was every thing that was vile in their eyes ; and as it was customary with them to break out into expressions of indignation and reproach, whenever the Saviour of mankind gave proofs of his divine love to the penitent, or when he wished to communicate the knowledge of salvation to all

that “ sat in darkness,” whether Jews, Gentiles, or Samaritans ; so they could not refrain from murmuring when he entered the house of Zaccheus ; saying, “ he is
“ gone to be guest with a man that is a
“ sinner.”

IT was from a knowledge of these prejudices, and a conviction of the disadvantages under which he labored, that Zaccheus was desirous of justifying himself in the presence of his heavenly guest, and said, not in the spirit of the boasting Pharisee, but from a steady, though humble consciousness of his own worth, “ Behold, Lord,
“ the half of my goods I give to the poor ;
“ and if I have taken any thing from any
“ man by false accusation, I restore him
“ four-fold.”

FROM an attentive consideration of the distinct parts of this passage of holy writ, we may derive many useful truths and salutary reflections. First, let us, like Zaccheus, have a view to the improvement of
our

our minds in piety and virtue, even in the gratification of our curiosity. Instead of flocking with childish folly to such trifling amusements as are unworthy of a rational being, we should endeavour to combine pleasure with instruction, and employment with advantage. While thousands would have crouded with joy to see a pageant, a triumph, or the barbarous spectacle of Roman games, Zaccheus ran and climbed up into a sycamore-tree to see our Lord pass by: and when he honored him so far as to take up his abode with him for that day, he not only received him joyfully, but without doubt listened to his conversation with reverence, and heard the glorious truths which his lips revealed with adoration and praise. We are warranted in supposing that this was the case from the gracious declaration of our Saviour, who, after he had entered his habitation, said, "This day is salvation come to this house."

THE hospitality of Zaccheus and his great satisfaction on this occasion, might

direct us also in the choice and entertainment of our friends. The familiar intercourse and common intimacies of the world are too often nothing but associations of pleasure, or confederacies of vice. Vanity, interest and self-love seem to be the grand ties, which unite the generality of mankind in the bands of fellowship; and which uphold the pleasures of what is called social enjoyment. Virtue and purity of heart are not deemed necessary in the choice of company; and piety is seldom or never thought of by many to render a character more interesting or more acceptable. Provided he stands clear of the gross and public violation of the laws, it is sufficient; a man may be a drunkard, a swearer, a seducer, and an infidel, without meeting much obstruction in his way through the world, and without finding his company generally shunned, or his vices reprov'd. If he can foster vanity, promote pleasure, banish reflection, and share in the tumultuous mirth of the banquet by indulging sensual appetites and countenancing excess, he is sure

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to be a welcome guest in the circles of the world, and more particularly at the entertainments of our metropolis. But, alas! if we knew, and duly considered “the things which belong unto our peace,” how much rather should we, in our social intercourses, select a few distinguished characters, such as might truly deserve the name of friends; such as might serve to correct our infirmities, form, or at least strengthen our principles, and train our minds to the duties of religion and the obligations of virtue!

WE should never be indifferent to reputation. If, indeed, we maintain any society with the wicked, it should be founded on the same principles which directed our blessed Lord's behaviour towards sinners. It should owe its subsistence entirely to the desire of doing good, to that divine benevolence which would at all times prompt us to contract the dominion of sin and extend the limits of virtue. And this, indeed, might often be effected by a mild and

winning mode of indirect instruction; by speaking to men, like our Divine Master, as it were "in parables," and leading them insensibly to teach themselves; by meek and gentle exhortation; by wholesome reproof, and the irresistible efficacy of good example.

BUT that thoughtless and promiscuous commerce which is carried on in the world, in which the profligate and the wicked mingle on the same terms with the pious and the good, does more mischief to religion and morality than is generally supposed. Vice should ever be shunned, reproofed, or at least, discouraged. From a mistaken liberality of mind, or under a false appearance of candor, men are often led to express their approbation of what they ought to despise, and to give a sanction by their presence, at least, if not by any other token of satisfaction, to scenes of ribaldry and vice, profaneness and impiety.

WE may farther learn from our blessed Lord's conduct towards Zaccheus, to wipe
away

away from our minds those uncharitable prejudices which so distinguished the character of the Jews. “ They all “ murmured that he should go to be guest “ with a man that was a sinner.”—Perverse and ignorant people! foolish, and blind of heart! Where could the Saviour of the world go with greater propriety, than to the dwellings of sinners, to the houses of the sick, or to the habitations of the wretched! Where could his divine ministry shine forth with more distinguished lustre? Did not he himself tell them repeatedly that they which are whole need not a physician, but they which are sick? and that he was come to seek and to save that which was lost?

To these sentiments of divine love and truth, however, they could never open their narrow hearts. Zaccheus was a publican; that alone was sufficient to suppress every benevolent action, and to excite in their bosoms abhorrence and disgust. Their hatred was violent and general. Without
making

making any discrimination, a whole body of people was consigned to infamy; and wherever they found a publican, they branded him as a sinner. But in the instance of Zaccheus how egregiously were they mistaken! He was a man who practised the exalted virtues of charity and munificence in a very rare and exemplary manner. If he had been led into any act of injury or oppression, he was willing to make the most ample restitution that the law required; and if in the discharge of his duty as a publican he conducted himself with more integrity than others would have done, so far from treating him with that general odium which they discovered to his whole fraternity, they ought to have regarded him with gratitude and esteem.

FROM the errors of the Jews, therefore, in this particular, let us carefully guard against that indiscriminate censure and those general prejudices which are but too prevalent in the world. There are good and worthy characters among all ranks of men,
and

and of every lawful trade and profession. And should some in their warfare with the world be exposed to more temptations than others, if they can “wash their hands in innocency” and keep their “conscience void of offence,” they are, like Zaccheus, entitled to a greater share of praise.

WERE we in forming our judgments of mankind, and in regulating our intercourse with them, to be governed by the prejudices that arise in the minds of many from external appearances, from peculiar modes of conduct, or situations of life; were we to suffer the sentiments of benevolence to die away, and the generous warmth of friendship to abate, from the partial accounts of an enemy, or the misrepresentations of scandal, malice and envy; what friend is there so attached to us, that we might not soon alienate, and what connection in life is there so dear that we might not quickly dissolve?

FROM such reflections let us learn, therefore, not to form our judgment of others,
or

or regulate our conduct towards them, by the rumors of the world; but in this, as in every thing else, let us reverence the precepts of our Lord Jesus Christ, and judge of men "by their fruits." This, indeed, is the only sure rule we have to go by. God only knows the heart, and the opinions of the world are always fallacious, and often unjust. The precepts of divine revelation are calculated to impress this truth deeply on our minds: we are there told, "that the friendship of the world is often enmity with God," and are directed to judge, not "according to appearance, but to judge righteous judgment."

NOT to dwell any longer on the injustice which Zaccheus suffered from the prejudices of the Jews to confirm these observations, we may remember, that the same bigoted and malignant people represented the Son of God himself, pure and immaculate as he was in his whole life and conversation, sometimes "as a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber," on other occasions as one "that was beside himself;" in short,

short, every thing that was infamous and wicked; as “ a blasphemer, a deceiver, “ and as one that had a devil.”

THERE are, indeed, no virtues and perfections of character which the malice of envy cannot disparage, or the perversion of sin even turn, by its malignant influence, into evil. The steady example of a good and holy life will always provoke the enmity of libertines, and the jealousy of those who are often wavering between the obligations of virtue and the gratifications of vice.

FROM the various conflicts of human passions, and the many secret propensities that slumber, and are occasionally called forth in the heart, it is utterly impossible that the opinion of the world should be unanimous in almost any thing. “ He “ who loves the praise of men better than “ the praise of God,” must make his court to the wicked as well as to the virtuous. He must check the emotions of ingenu-
ous

ous virtue whenever they might be thought unseasonable, though the avowal of them perhaps, would prove acceptable in the sight of God, and stifle the sentiments of honest indignation, in order to humour the vices and the follies of those with whom he lives. From a knowledge that mere worldlings are always in danger of this odious species of meanness, falsehood and hypocrisy, our Saviour made this striking declaration to his disciples—"Woe unto you, when ALL men shall speak well of you."

THE judgments of men are often ill-founded also, in consequence of partial benevolence, as well as from avowed malice or concealed depravity. Few are there in the world that have not some friends, and fewer still, perhaps, that have not an enemy. It is not difficult for either to confound the qualities of vice and virtue, and, on certain occasions, to blend the characteristics of the former with the kindred properties of the latter. If, for instance, we indulge the malignant passion of envy, or ill-nature,

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we can call frugality MEANNESS, and generosity EXTRAVAGANCE. We can exhibit innocence and good-nature in the garb of FOLLY, and disparage every virtue, by giving it the dark colouring of INTEREST, or SELF-LOVE. But when the partiality of friendship governs our tongue, we can find out in almost every vice some affinity to virtue, some alliance with goodness, or some relation to excellence. The prodigal and the spendthrift are palmed upon the world for men of liberal and generous principles; the rapacious miser is concealed under the specious appearance of prudence and œconomy; and even folly is recommended to our kindness under the inviting form of good-nature.

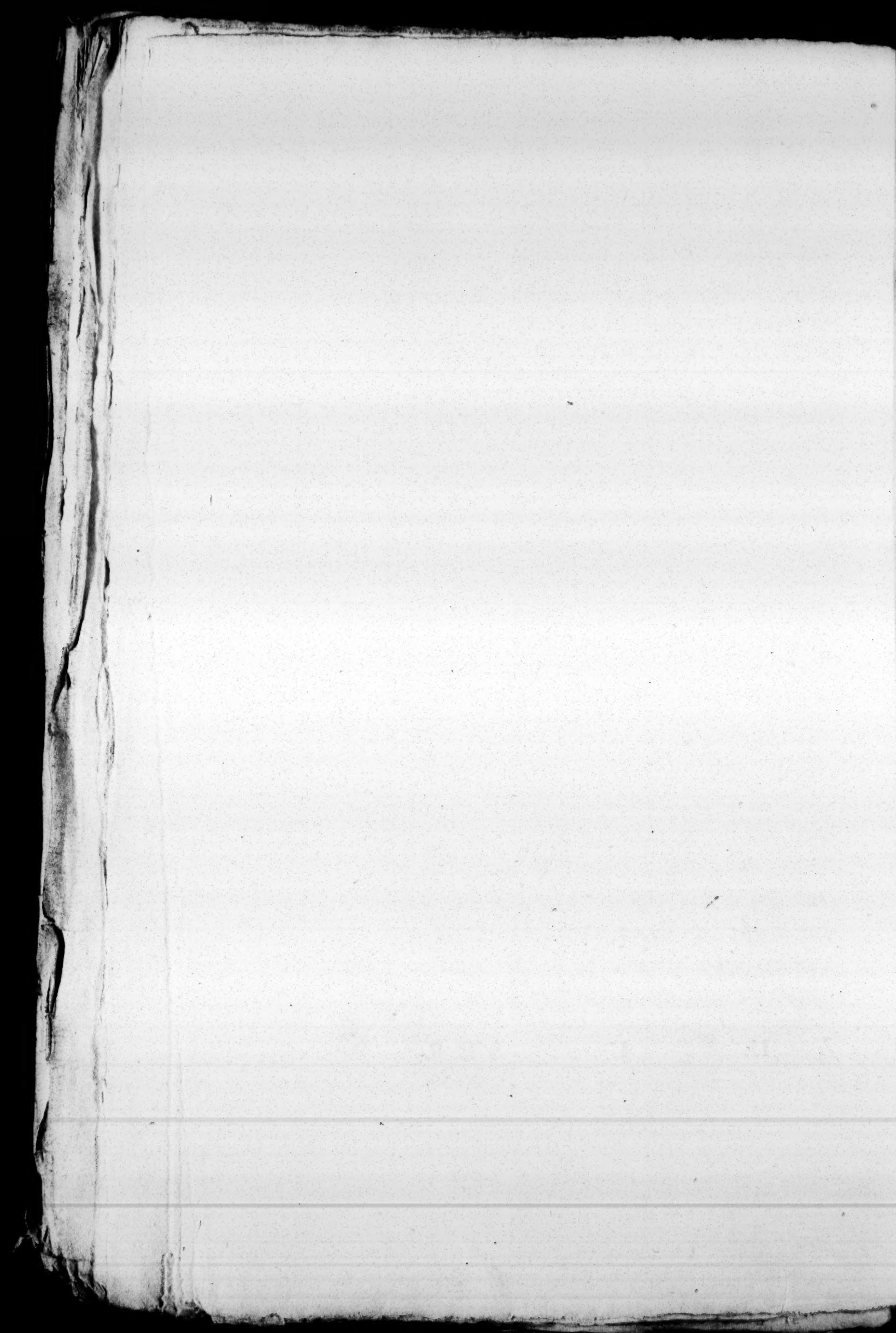
THUS it happens (without taking into consideration the inconsistency of human conduct and the fluctuating state of the heart) that almost every man has two or three characters circulating through the world, and all sufficiently distinct. Envy and malignity will always furnish one; impartiality,

impartiality, perhaps, will draw another with a chaste and correct hand ; and friendship will produce a third in the glaring colours of flattery and fondness.

LET these reflections teach us to cultivate that soundness and sobriety of mind which is neither to be tainted by the corruption, nor deceived by the falshood of the world. In forming and maintaining our duty towards our neighbour, let that “ charity which “ thinketh no evil,” and “ that wisdom “ which is from above,” regulate our principles and conduct.

WHEN in any doubt or perplexity, let us remember, that to err on the side of virtue is always to err on the right side. The vices and hypocrisy, the folly and the sufferings of mankind will always enforce the lesson of worldly prudence, but are not so likely to teach us the more important duties of charity and candor, truth, justice and benevolence. To learn these exalted virtues and all other Chris-
tians

tian graces, we must have recourse to that divine wisdom which was revealed to us by “the Holy one of God,” to cleanse our hearts from the pollutions of sin, to enlighten our understandings, to correct our errors, and help our manifold infirmities.



S E R M O N XIII.

ON GODLY SORROW, AND THE SORROW
OF THE WORLD.

2 COR. vii. 10.

For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of; but the sorrow of the world worketh death.

ST. PAUL had not long established a church at Corinth, before the vices of that opulent and luxurious city corrupted the faith of his new disciples. The Judaizing christians were, doubtless, eager to blend the rites and customs, to which they had been so long attached, with the pure

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and spiritual institutions of the gospel. The Pharisees, we may suppose, were as usual tenacious of form and ceremony, and probably gave rise to that violent controversy, which seems to have taken place, on the subject of eating meats offered to idols. The Sadducees might, in some measure, have propagated THEIR narrow notions; and among other dangerous heresies, produced in some a disbelief, or at least a doubt, of the resurrection. While the infidels and scoffers of those ages, as well as the present, rejoiced in seeing that religion “which “ was from above,” torn by the petty violence of contending sectaries, debased by idle superstitions, or polluted with the mixture of human vices and follies.

THERE are, indeed, many reasons to prove the difficulty of establishing christianity on any solid foundation at Corinth; and even when established, there were other causes, beside the general depravity of man, that tended to corrupt its doctrines, and mutilate its power. Nothing but the eloquence

quence and zeal of the great apostle of the Gentiles could have settled, in so short a time, a church whose influence soon extended through "all the regions of Achaia."

THE people of Corinth had grown rich by trade; and their ancient city, with many others, had been plundered and destroyed by the jealous tyranny of the Romans: but they were again rising to opulence and power; and such were the local advantages of the place, that their town was already become the mart of foreign nations. Hither men of almost every denomination flocked for business, or for pleasure. The voluptuous entertainments and the many sensual gratifications which this famous city still afforded, were a sufficient attraction for such as followed nothing but the pursuits of pleasure; while her commerce and her wealth invited the merchant to her harbours from different parts of the world. In whatever light we view this confused mass of people, we cannot but regard the spot where they lived, and where they were daily

carrying on their schemes of worldly advantage, or forming promiscuous associations of pleasure, as unfavorable to the interests of christianity. Every one that had the cause of religion at heart, and owned its influence in regulating his passions and governing his conduct, must have been zealous for the maintenance of his own peculiar tenets, and was anxious, perhaps, to impress their importance and their truth on the minds of others.

IN a maritime town so populous, and consisting of such a variety of inhabitants as that of Corinth, Jews and Gentiles of every description must have presented to the eyes of the vulgar, and, indeed, to the contemplation of every unprejudiced observer, such a scene of jarring heresies and schism, as was sufficient to perplex their minds, and alienate their hearts from the precepts and duties of all religion. It is true, this indifference to the reigning superstitions of the times, might have disposed the more
virtuous

virtuous and sober-minded to embrace the blessed doctrines of Christ with greater willingness. And so it certainly did. But the Corinthians, we may suppose, were in general either rich and luxurious, or abandoned to sinful pleasures and vicious indulgences. Their minds had been poisoned, also, with false and corrupt systems, or distracted by the idle disputes of wrangling sectaries. Or, if they chose to have the reputation of being religious, they could embrace their native polytheism, and under the sanction of its flattering and corrupt principles, unite the practice of almost every vice with what was called the worship of the gods.

SUCH a body of people were not likely to receive a dispensation which disclaimed both the wisdom and the pleasures of the world; which had no recourse to the performance of sacrifice and oblation for the atonement of sins, and which, rejecting all the pomp and parade of Pagan priesthood,

required only practical piety and the mild virtues of social life.

BESIDES, christianity could promise no comfort to such as daily flocked to the temples of dissipation, or sat down at the voluptuous banquets of pleasure; nor could she be more indulgent, or more acceptable, to those whose whole hearts were engrossed with the things of this world. She conferred her peculiar blessings "on the meek, "on the poor in spirit, and on them that "mourn." Neither the voluptuary nor the mere worldly-minded man could hope for countenance or favor from the gospel of Christ. It was "the pure in heart, and "they who were persecuted for righteousness' sake," that were to enjoy the promises, and to enter into the kingdom of God.

ACCORDINGLY, we find, the holy apostle had occasion to complain that they, like the Galatians, "were soon removed "from him that called them." Schisms
of

of different kinds had distracted their minds and withdrawn them from some of the essential truths, and practical duties of christianity. They had been guilty of incest and fornication ; which it appears they wanted to reconcile with the law of Christ. They had been so shockingly profane, as to indulge themselves in gluttony and drunkenness at the Lord's supper ; and had proceeded so far, as to deny the resurrection of the body.

ON this melancholy occasion the holy apostle felt the most anxious and tender concern. Their apostacy brought a scandal on the cross, and their vices were a disgrace to their profession. He wrote to them, therefore, his first epistle, “ out of much
“ affliction and anguish of heart.” The success of it, though wonderfully adapted to the purpose for which it was written, must have exceeded his expectations. It produced a general reformation throughout the church. It resolved their doubts and
settled

settled their principles. It roused them from the bed of sensual pleasures, and awakened their minds to thought, reflection and "carefulness." It led them to a vindication of themselves; in which they proved, that they had not been altogether so culpable as he thought them; and, above all, the admonition and reproof of their zealous and affectionate apostle produced in their minds no inconsiderable portion of that "godly sorrow which worketh repentance to salvation."

THE short-lived triumph of thoughtless vanity and guilty joys was over, and the season of reflection returned. Doubtless they reflected on the disinterested zeal and fervent piety which distinguished the illustrious Paul, and contrasted the beautiful simplicity of the gospel-morality with the narrow prejudices of Judaism, and the flattering, but corrupt systems of heathen mythology. They meditated on their past conduct; they considered, perhaps, that,
by

by their shameful disobedience, they had injured their best friend and benefactor, and they were earnest to be reconciled to him again; lest "he might indeed have sorrow from them of whom he ought to rejoice." To the sentiments of gratitude and reverence the tender emotions of contrition were united, and in the hour of their affliction, they felt the absence of that peace which proceedeth from "the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort." The holy apostle bears testimony to the salutary efficacy of their sorrow, on this occasion, in the words of the text, contrasting the nature of it, in the same sentence, with what he calls "the sorrow of the world."

THE subsequent part of this discourse, therefore, shall be employed in endeavouring to explain the nature of these different kinds of sorrow, and to illustrate the truth of St. Paul's assertion.

AMONG

AMONG the many calamities with which life abounds, it is wonderful that we do not more frequently discover some share of that "godly sorrow," which the Corinthians felt. As it should be the supreme felicity of every rational being to please the Almighty Father of the universe, so there is nothing that ought to give us greater pain than the consciousness of having offended him. For a creature framed for immortality to labor under the displeasure of that awful power, "in whose hands are "the issues of life and death," presents to us the most deplorable idea of wretchedness and guilt. And for any human being to be indifferent, even to the POSSIBILITY of such an event, argues a mind either incapable of reflection, or miserably depraved.

YET, however dangerous and sinful such indolent security and thoughtless negligence might appear, when the interests of eternity are concerned, we frequently meet with characters that are alive to the griefs and joys of the world, and appear careless
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and insensible only when they consider their actions and their conduct in relation to God. But I will assert, that nothing truly great, generous or good, can be expected from the man who is thus estranged from his Maker; whose heart is never softened with contrition at the remembrance of past sins, and who does not endeavour, by “newness of life,” to make his peace with heaven.

HIS sensibility, on other occasions, and those compunctions of nature, which originate from different principles, may be considered as mere instincts, or trifling habits of the soul, that are often modelled by fashion and directed by the powers of imagination; or ranked in the catalogue of those loose affections that sometimes spring from vanity, and sometimes from selfish passions.

NEXT to the primary sense of right and wrong, of good and evil, which ought ever to be kept alive within us, there is
nothing

nothing so necessary to purify and correct the evil dispositions of our nature, as that “godly sorrow,” which the holy apostle so highly commended in his disciples at Corinth. It may be considered as the forerunner of every thing that is excellent in morals, or beautiful in piety. To the exercises of reason, and the studies of meditation, it communicates the efficacy of passion, and strengthens the determinations of the understanding with the softest emotions of the heart. It subdues the violence of every unruly principle, and operates as a gentle, but powerful corrective on the whole system of life. It inspires that meek and quiet spirit which seldom fails to dispose the mind to “hear instruction;” and, in the end, will most assuredly “work that repentance which leadeth to salvation, not to be repented of.”

THE apostle has contrasted this humble contrition, with which so many blessings are connected, and which he so justly calls “godly sorrow,” with what he terms “the
“ sorrow

“ sorrow of the world ;” and melancholy indeed is the contrast. The one conducts us through this valley of tears to the blessedness of heaven ; the other, combined with vicious principles and guilty passions, involves us in misery, and leads to death !

BUT it may not be unprofitable for us to consider, somewhat more particularly, the nature of that sorrow on which the apostle has pronounced so strong a condemnation. Not only this, but almost every thing that is evil, we may ascribe to the inordinate love of this world, and the corrupt influence of those sinful passions with which it is generally combined ; such as ENVY, PRIDE, and a COVETOUSNESS, that often amounts to a species of IDOLATRY. The sacred volume, in which the errors and the frailties of human nature are delineated with the pen of divine truth, and in which every one may read a faithful transcript of his own heart ; will furnish us with examples to illustrate, and precepts to correct this worldly sorrow, from whatever motive it might arise.

AGAINST the vain cares and anxieties of the world our blessed Lord particularly warns us in his divine sermon on the mount. In his admirable parable of the Sower also you will remember, that portion of the seed which fell among thorns was lost. We need not wonder, indeed, where the satisfactions of piety and those high hopes that spring from it, form no share of our happiness, but where life is squandered away in the pursuits of pleasure or of gain, that “The cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches should choke the word, and that it should bring no fruit to perfection.”

IF we wish to view the misery and guilt of worldly sorrow arising from ENVY, we need only read the unfortunate history of the wretched Saul. If you would contemplate the same lamentable effects proceeding from PRIDE, the characters of Haman and Ahithophel will furnish a striking picture, and finished in such gloomy colors,

as

as may give us a dreadful idea of “ the
“ sorrow of the world.” In both it veri-
fied the apostle’s declaration, and “ led to
“ death.”

COMPARATIVELY speaking, affliction
and calamity seldom proceed from any ex-
traordinary visitations of divine providence.
They are the offspring of a disordered
mind, of negligence and folly, of guilt
and sin. But though the evil propensities
of nature be indulged ; though passion be
permitted to hunt for gratification through
the whole circle of worldly pleasures ; and
though imagination be wearied in seeking
for new objects of desire, it is in vain to
hope for permanent enjoyment, or com-
pleat gratification.

ENVY is always the associate of misery ;
to the painful mortifications of PRIDE there
is no end ; and to the COVETOUS, not even
the wealth, the dignity and power of roy-
alty can give perfect satisfaction. Who
would not have supposed Ahab, for in-
stance,

stance, in a state that excluded, at least, the miseries that wait on covetousness, however he might have been tormented with other guilty passions. Yet we perceive that no small portion of his worldly sorrow arose from this mean vice. He coveted the vineyard of Naboth, and was disappointed in the earnest, but trifling object of his desire. The virtuous Jezreelite, with an honorable and independent spirit, would not sell "the inheritance of his fathers for money." The consequence was, that the wretched Ahab, we read, "went into his house heavy" and displeased. And he laid him down "upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread." Here we may discover another striking instance of the sorrow of the world; and this too, like that of Haman and Ahithophel, fully confirmed the apostle's assertion, and "led to" perjury, to cruelty, and to death.

BUT we must not suppose, that all the sorrows which arise from our intercourse with the world have this evil tendency; or that there are not other griefs of a
moral

moral and religious influence, beside those which are caused by a sense of neglected duty. To sympathise with the afflicted, to compassionate the poor, and to shed the tear of pity over the frailties and misfortunes of those who are dear to us, are duties which the Saviour of the world has enjoined us to practise.

FEW are the genuine fruits of Christian piety that can grow up to perfection in a hard, unfeeling heart. The spirit which is from above is "gentle, kind;" and its holy influence should teach us to "be pitiful, as well as courteous;" to "rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep." It so intimately connects duty with sentiment, and so inseparably blends the rational motives to piety with the best affections of the heart, that it is difficult to say whether the former, or the latter, should have the greater influence on our character and conduct.

WHEN we go to “the house of mourning,” or assist in performing the last melancholy office to a departed friend, do we regret the tear that is involuntarily shed over his grave? Do we not dwell, with mournful satisfaction, on the hours of social pleasure in which he once shared with us, and which are now gone for ever? Do we not associate these ideas with the tenderest emotions of the heart, and look forward, with anxious concern, to that hour when we hope others will discover the same affectionate regard for us, and shew, by their sorrows, that we, too, were once beloved? Yes, the whole tenor of Christian duty serves to cherish these mournful sympathies of nature, because they are always connected with some good dispositions of the soul, or lead to the practice of the more amiable virtues.

THESE, indeed, are not to be ranked among “the sorrows of the world,” since the Saviour of the world himself has sanctified them by his own example. When
his

his friend Lazarus was no more, and his affectionate sisters, with other of his friends, were weeping over the grave, possibly, in his human character, he caught the sensations of sorrow from the mournful scene that was presented to his view, and condescended to indulge them; he recollected, perhaps, the few comforts which, during his painful sojourning here, he had shared in the little domestic society of Martha and her sister, and Lazarus whom he loved, and therefore he groaned in the spirit, he sorrowed, and “ he wept.”

ST. LUKE presents us with another scene of virtuous and godly sorrow in the Acts of the holy apostles. It is in the twentieth chapter, where St. Paul, previous to his departure for Jerusalem, commits the care of the church to the elders, and takes his last farewell of the Christian brethren. The whole is an admirable specimen of Christian eloquence and Christian humanity.

“WATCH and remember,” says the venerable apostle, towards the conclusion of his address, “that by the space of
“three years, I ceased not to warn every
“one, night and day, with tears. And
“now, brethren, I commend you to God,
“and to the word of his grace, which is
“able to build you up, and to give you an
“inheritance among all them which are
“sanctified. I have coveted no man’s
“silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, you
“yourselves know, that these hands have
“ministered unto my necessities, and to
“them that were with me. I have shewed
“you all things, how that so laboring ye
“ought to support the weak; and to re-
“member the words of the Lord Jesus,
“how he said, It is more blessed to give
“than to receive.” And “when he had
“thus spoken, he kneeled down and prayed
“with them all; And they all wept sore,
“and fell on Paul’s neck and kissed him,
“sorrowing most of all for the words
“which he spake, that they should see
“his face no more.”

FROM

FROM the contemplation of such scenes, and the interest which they create, who could turn, with any pleasure or satisfaction, to the inflexible fortitude of pagan heroes, and the pretended virtues of stoicism? Who could bear to see the dearest privileges of nature violated and sacrificed to the indulgence of a fierce and savage pride, or to the maintenance of a haughty and ferocious dignity?

LET us learn, therefore, to cultivate a disposition of mind that is allied to so many virtues; and let us never be ashamed of discovering that "godly sorrow," which was so effectual in reclaiming the Corinthians from the error of their way, and which occasionally gave such efficacy and force to the apostle's admonition and reproof. At the same time, let us carefully discriminate between the sorrow which I have been now describing, and that which is of the world. The characteristic properties of either, are, indeed, so very distinct, that we cannot well mistake them.

There is almost the same difference between godly sorrow and the sorrow of the world, as there is between the wisdom that is from above and that which is not. “ The one is pure, peaceable and gentle; full of good fruits and without hypocrisy; but the other is earthly, sensual, devilish.”

IF we sorrow, therefore, let it always be on the side of virtue. Let it not arise from the envy of our neighbour's wealth or power; not from any overweening fondness for the things of this world, or disappointment in the pursuit of its business and pleasures; not from the disorder of evil and corrupt affections, nor the corrosions of enmity, malice, and revenge. But if it be our lot to suffer for a time under the gracious dispensation of infinite wisdom and goodness, let our sorrows be so improved by patience and the comfort of God's holy word, that they may always dispose us to virtue, or “ work repentance to salvation not to be repented of.”

S E R-

S E R M O N XIV.

ON THE CHARACTER AND CONDUCT
OF ST. PETER.

MATT. X. 2.

Now the names of the twelve apostles are these; The first, Simon, who is called PETER.

THE character of St. PETER is one of the most distinguished in the gospel-history, and therefore deserves to be particularly considered. In his mind were united qualities that are seemingly opposite and incompatible. His zeal and adoration for his heavenly Lord were unbounded; and yet
would

would he occasionally presume to oppose his conduct, and from an affectionate, but mistaken friendship, even question the propriety of his sentiments.

THE prominent features of his mind were a lively sensibility and a generous ardor, that prompted him to speak and act without sufficient reflection. Conscious of the rectitude of his principles and the good dispositions of his heart, he seldom adverted to the frailties of human nature; but thought that "to DO," as well as "to WILL" that "which is good, was always present to him." With an uncommon share of fortitude, he seems to have possessed a degree of weakness and irresolution that almost excites our wonder. His attachment to virtue, indeed, was ever unshaken, his sentiments were always warm and enthusiastic; but by the impulse of his passions, he was sometimes hurried into unnecessary dangers, and situations that proved too arduous for his strength.

YET it must not be forgotten that no portion of unbecoming pride, or self-love, led him to justify his errors. Whenever he offended, his sorrow was unfeigned, and his contrition sincere.

A CHARACTER dignified with such virtues cannot but be highly interesting to us; and might acquire some additional power over the heart, perhaps, from being blended with a few imperfections, that claim kindred with humanity.

IN discoursing on the words of the text, therefore, I shall endeavour to illustrate and confirm these observations respecting the holy apostle, by select passages from the different evangelists. The distinct points of view in which these will represent him, may suggest to us a train of reflections well worthy of our attention, and we may close our meditations on the subject, by considering how the infirmities of his temper were corrected, and his mind formed to true holiness, by the discipline of the gospel of Christ.

HIS

HIS zeal and adoration for the person of our blessed Lord, will appear from the following texts of scripture. Immediately after the miraculous draught of fishes, Peter with an enthusiastic devotion “fell
“down at Jesus’ knees, saying depart from
“me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” So much was he overawed by the appearance of that divine Person who came from God, and the demonstration of his power, that he not only fell to the earth to express his adoration, but with the deepest sense of humility, requested him “to depart from him,” as being unworthy to remain in his presence.

WHEN the Messiah, also, appeared to his disciples walking on the sea, Peter said unto him, “Lord, if it be thou, bid me
“come unto thee on the water.” Here we discover the same ardent zeal, which would not suffer him to rest satisfied with performing the ordinary duties of devotion, but which led him to expose himself to hazardous trials and unnecessary danger.
The

The consequence was what might have been expected. The triumphant fortitude of the christian sunk in the moment of trial, and the weakness of the man appeared. "When he saw the wind boisterous
" he was AFRAID; and beginning to sink,
" he cried, saying, Lord, save me."

How many like the warm, enthusiastic Peter, are hurried by some sudden emotion of the mind into situations that prove too great for their strength, or rather for their infirmity to support! How many have launched into the stormy sea of passion, and after being pierced through with many sorrows, have sunk into "the bed of death," without ever calling on their Saviour for succour and protection!

To what has been said on this head it may be necessary only to add, that when our Lord asked his disciples "Whom they said he was?" Peter was the first to stand forth and declare, "Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God."

That

That one whose mind was so deeply impressed with reverence for his heavenly Master, should not implicitly acquiesce in all his sentiments, especially as he made no scruple to declare, more than once, that he was the Son of God, is somewhat extraordinary ; yet this was the case with the apostle PETER.

WHEN the Saviour of the world, in his great humility, prepared to wash his disciples' feet; that he might give them an example of that condescending love, which should lead men to perform the lowliest offices of kindness towards their brethren, when there is a necessity for it ; and to shew, perhaps, according to the typical representations of the times, how the influence of his holy word was to cleanse their hearts; PETER with friendly, but inconsiderate warmth, said, " Thou shalt never wash
" my feet." Yet when Jesus answered,
" If I wash thee not, thou hast no part
" with me ;" he replied with equal ardor,
" Lord,

“ Lord, not my feet only, but also my
“ hands and my head.”

ON this occasion he discovered none of that unfeigned submission and perfect obedience, which the Messiah himself at all times shewed to the will of his heavenly Father. When he was about to suffer the pangs of the most cruel death, that he might accomplish the great work of our redemption, HIS language was, “ O, my
“ Father, if it be POSSIBLE, let this cup
“ pass from me; nevertheless, not as I
“ will, but as thou wilt.”

BUT there is a passage in St. Matthew's gospel which sets this part of the apostle's character in a more striking point of view. According to the grand plan of divine Providence, which had been shadowed out by the prophets, typified by the solemnities of the Jewish passover, as well as other rites, and handed down with pious reverence through a long series of ages, the Saviour of the world was now about to make the
grand

grand atonement for sin by the precious sacrifice of himself. The hour was now come, he told his faithful followers, when “The Son of Man was to go up to Jerusalem and suffer many things of the elders, and chief priests and scribes, and be put to death, and raised again the third day.” On this solemn occasion, when his other disciples listened with awful reverence and pious sorrow, “PETER,” says Saint Matthew, “took him and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee.” A strange instance of presumption this, however it might, in some measure, be palliated by the tender and affectionate motives that gave rise to it. It discovered that the impetuosity of his temper had rendered him incapable of reflecting with due attention and becoming humility on the precepts and the office of his Lord and Saviour. He had either indulged the mistaken hope, that the Messiah’s kingdom was to be distinguished with the splendor and power of worldly prosperity; or had,
for

for the instant, given way to the quick emotions of fond and passionate friendship. However this might have been, it drew from our Lord such severity of reproof as seldom fell from his lips ; but such as was highly necessary to correct the errors of him to whom it was addressed. Seeing it in that point of view which was likely to excite his indignation, “ he turned unto
“ Peter, and said, Get thee behind me,
“ Satan ; thou art an offence unto me ;
“ for thou favourest not the things that
“ be of God, but those that be of men.”

THOUGH it may be almost unnecessary, after what has been advanced, to say any thing further to prove that the apostle Peter was a man of an ardent and impetuous disposition, yet I will lay before you a few more passages of scripture that render this part of his character clear and decisive. When the Jews, conducted by the traitor Judas, came to apprehend our Lord, Peter, fired with indignation at the violence that was offered to his person, and without

adverting to the established plan of providence, the express declaration of his divine Master himself with regard to the manner of his death, or the dignity of his own character as the apostle of Christ, “ drew his sword, and smote the servant
“ of the High Priest and cut off his right
“ ear.”

WHEN he was informed by Mary Magdalen that the body of our blessed Lord was removed from the sepulchre in which he had been laid, he, with the other disciple whom Jesus loved, went forth and came to the sepulchre: but the other disciple, says St. John of himself, “ did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre, yet went he not in;” but his companion when he came up, was withheld from no motives of reverence, or religious fear, but boldly entered into the monumental cave of death. After the resurrection, also, St. John informs us, that Jesus stood on the shore, while Simon and other disciples were in a vessel and fishing at a distance.

tance. When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, " he girt his fisher's coat " unto him (for he was naked) and did " cast himself into the sea." This was an instance of such enthusiastic devotion, as well suited his general character and disposition. The occasion was indeed affecting. It was his heavenly Lord, whom he had offended, risen from the dead. He had left him in the hands of his enemies, nor could he attend him in his last moments to catch his dying words, or enjoy the melancholy pleasure of suffering with him. His other disciples; and even his mother, severe as the trial must have been, were present at this awful scene of death, and saw him expire on the cross. Indeed it was necessary that they should, for otherwise how could they have borne witness unto the last? But Peter was absent, and various were the sorrows that pierced his heart. Imagine then what must have been his joy when he saw his blessed Master restored to life! Doubtless he was earnest to throw himself at his feet, to implore his

forgiveness, with the mingled emotions of penitence and joy, and therefore “ he girt “ his fisher’s coat unto him, and did cast “ himself into the sea.”

WE come now to consider him in another point of view—as possessing an uncommon share of fortitude, united with no inconsiderable portion of human weakness. This is a light in which he appears more on a level with the generality of mankind, and therefore we should reflect on the testimony which the holy gospel affords us on this head, with greater and more interested attention.

IN the mean time, let us not think that we are taking any unbecoming liberty in thus contemplating the imperfections of the holy apostle, before the spirit of the gospel had produced its full effect on his mind, or, to use his own beautiful expression, “ before the day had dawned, “ and the DAY-STAR had arisen in his “ HEART ;” since our blessed Lord himself,

self, even at a late period of his divine ministry on earth, addressed him thus: "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and WHEN thou art CONVERT-ED," added he, "strengthen thy brethren." From this and other passages already quoted, it appears that Peter was not yet free from the general frailties of nature, and the more particular infirmities of his own disposition. But this will be more evident from the following observations.

HE had often professed the firmest and most zealous attachment for his divine Master; he had declared that he would lay down his life for his sake, and "that he was ready to go with him to prison and to death." Impressed with these devout affections, he and the two sons of Zebedee had retired with their Saviour just before his last sufferings; when the hour was drawing nigh, in which he was to make his soul an offering for sin.

AT this awful crisis, the heavenly Messiah felt all the agony that is incident to human nature, on the certain prospect of the greatest affliction. His soul was exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death. His three disciples were witnesses of his anguish, and the only comfort which this world could then afford him under it. It should seem that he received a melancholy sort of pleasure in their company, for his request to them was, "tarry ye here, and "watch with me." When he advanced, however, a little farther to pour out his heart in prayer to the everlasting Father, he returned and found them sleeping—but sleeping, adds St. Luke, for sorrow. It is somewhat strange that a man like Peter, whose passions were so lively, and whose devotion was so warm, should not have been kept watching, and that too with the most anxious attention. But this may serve to shew us the weakness of human nature, and that the utmost vigilance and steady fortitude are absolutely necessary to keep us in the path of duty.

THEIR

THEIR conduct drew from our Lord a bright example of that meek and gentle “wisdom, which is from above,” and which dignified all his words and actions. It comprehended a mild expostulation, a precept that might fortify their minds in future, and the most charitable apology for what had passed. “What, said he, could “ye not watch with me one hour? Watch “and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: The spirit, indeed, is willing, but “the flesh is weak.” The scene that follows closes the history of Peter’s frailties.

HE had declared, in the presence of his Saviour, that he would lay down his life for his sake; and when he was told, in order to check that rash, presumptuous spirit which on all occasions governed his mind, and never suffered him to doubt his own sufficiency, that “before the cock “should crow, he would deny him thrice,” he replied with unabated ardor, “though “I should die with thee, yet will I not “deny thee.”

Y 4

WHAT

WHAT was the consequence? He was involved in a series of events which he could by no means foresee, and led, as he had been before, into a situation which his fortitude was unable to support. By the sudden impulse of passion he was induced to commit an act of violence, and to maim the servant of the high-priest, without being of any service to his Lord. He was prevailed on, however, by motives of affectionate zeal, to follow afar off, when the Saviour of the world was dragged away to justice. He even entered the palace of the high-priest. There he had the grief and mortification to see his divine Master treated with the most brutal cruelty, without having it in his power to assist him. What must have been the feelings of such a heart as Peter's, when he beheld his blessed Master buffeted and spit on, smitten with the palms of hands by wretches, who, to add insult to their barbarity, cried, in derision, "Prophesy unto us, thou, Christ, who is he that smote thee?"

DURING

DURING this cruel scene, Peter was suddenly charged with being one of his disciples ; and he, as suddenly, (partly from fear perhaps, as his life was in danger, and partly from an instantaneous impulse of the mind) answered, " I am not." Being charged again, and that with additional evidence against him, may we not imagine, that the shame and the disgrace of falshood rushed into his mind, and that he was led to aggravate his crime with oaths and imprecations. Still his persecutors persisted (and one in particular we may suppose, as he was kinsman to him whose ear Peter had cut off) and still he denied. Here ended this scene of falshood, this lamentable triumph of sin over human virtue and human fortitude, for immediately the cock crew. " Peter remembered the words of " Jesus," who in the meekness of his affliction only turned and looked at him ; but it was a look of such penetrating expression, that it pierced the aged apostle to the heart ; he could no longer endure his presence, " but went out, and wept bitterly."

FROM

FROM that very moment the holy apostle seems to have become a new man ; and the contemplation of his character from this period will be more pleasing, and perhaps more useful. Experience, indeed, had now impressed her salutary lessons on his mind ; he had often exposed himself to the just reproof of one whom he loved and adored : he had more than once encountered unnecessary dangers ; he had suffered from the violence of his temper, when he had no evil intention at heart ; he had lastly been betrayed into crimes and wept bitterly.

BUT there was a something so ingenuous in his grief, and so unfeigned in his repentance, that promised, with sufficient assurance, those blessed effects which proceeded from it. When the Jewish rulers with imperious threats commanded him not to speak at all, nor teach in the name of Jesus, how different was his reply from what we should have expected of him a few years before ! “ Whether it be right
“ in the sight of God, to hearken unto
“ you

“you more than unto God, judge ye.” Here we may discover all his former magnanimity, blended with that complacent dignity and steady fortitude, which the precepts of the holy gospel tend to inspire.

PREVIOUS to his being cast into prison, he had learnt to suffer patiently like a good soldier of Christ; for though bound with chains and lying between two soldiers, he was found sleeping in his dungeon, and enjoying the blessed peace of godliness. The good seed had now sprung up in his mind, and brought forth fruit an hundred-fold. In his general epistle to the brethren, he could recommend “the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit.” From dear-bought experience, he could now tell them that “he who will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil and his lips that they speak no guile.” In short, we see the glorious influence of the holy gospel on his whole character and conduct. It formed his temper, moderated his passions, improved his warmth and energy of soul

soul into true magnanimity, and, instead of the wild flights of imagination, and the involuntary bursts of enthusiasm, it gave him habits of piety that were rational, steady and calm.

FAR from encouraging that hasty, or careless disposition, which leads men to reject or adopt every opinion that is offered to them, without sufficient examination, it taught him also “to be ready to give an answer to every one that asked a reason of the hope that was in him, with meekness and with fear,”

LET me hope, that the holy influence of God's word may have this happy effect on our lives and conversation. Many of us have more infirmities than ever the apostle Peter had to correct, and but few I fear who have so sincere a desire to do it. Instead of confessing their sins, like him, with tears of penitence, how many will strive to gloss over errors and crimes, that spring from disordered passions and a cor-

rupt mind, with the specious colouring of amiable weakneſſes, exceſſive ſenſibility, or ſome other doubtful quality, that is as often allied to VICE, perhaps, as VIRTUE.

LET it be our ſtudy to examine into all our frailties and all our ſecret faults, with that godly ſincerity which becomes chriſtians. If we are in danger of ſuffering from the violence of ungoverned paſſions, let us learn “to keep the heart with all “diligence, for out of it are the iſſues of “life.” If we are diſpoſed to truſt too much in ourſelves, and ruſh careleſſly on, without relying on any thing but our own ſtrength, let us remember the bitter tears which Peter ſhed, and learn to guard againſt the ſin that doth ſo eaſily beſet us, in this wicked and ſeducing world.

IN a word, let the precepts and example of that heavenly Meſſiah, who ſo effectually purified the heart and eſtabliſhed the principles of his frail, but zealous diſciple, be the rule and guide of our lives. Let us
believe,

believe, that if after having professed his glory and worshipped him, in “the great congregation,” as the Son of God, we relapse into all the disorders of a vicious life, we deny him, as effectually, as ever PETER did, and we may be assured that his all-seeing eye looks on us as it did on him. Could we but fully possess our minds with this awful idea, the tear of contrition would no longer be withheld, than till we communed with our own hearts, and it might soon produce in us the blessed effects of righteousness, and spring up, like “the living waters of the gospel, into everlasting life.”

S E R M O N XV.

ON THE DUTY OF EXAMINING INTO
OUR SECRET FAULTS.

P S A L M XIX. 12.

*Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou
me from secret faults.*

THE faculties of the human mind are never acknowledged to be more imperfect, perhaps, than when they are applied to estimate the merit or demerit of men's actions. In order to form an opinion on this subject that might have the sanction of justice, we must know the motives and intentions of the heart. We ought to
be

be able to trace the progress of vice and virtue through the mind, from the first impressions made on the imagination, to the moment in which they break forth into action, and become manifest to the world. Into this account it is necessary that we should take many exterior and adventitious circumstances, which serve to chequer the scenes of life with happiness or misery, and which will always determine, more or less, the conduct of every intellectual being.

BUT to discoveries so various, so subtle and profound, the faculties with which mere mortals are endowed never can attain. It is for this reason that human laws can seldom reach the heart, and only take cognizance of such actions and such intentional crimes, as have a direct tendency to destroy the peace, and subvert the happiness of society. Hence, also, arises the obligation of those mild duties which our blessed Lord so strongly inculcated. From a knowledge of our own ignorance, and a consciousness of our own frailties, we admire, though
we

we too often neglect to practise, that charity which is “the bond of perfectness, which thinketh no evil, and which is not easily provoked.”

IT is true, we can discern with sufficient certainty, the striking features of vice and virtue as they are exhibited in the world. Often do we meet with such characters as leave us no reason to doubt that they are “the servants of sin;” and sometimes, I trust, others fall in our way, whose good qualities might provoke our emulation, and remind us of our own unworthiness.

BUT the human heart is generally divided between two masters; and though it may sometimes “despise the one,” yet it will not with invariable constancy, love or abide by the other. Hence the virtues of our fellow-creatures are often of a doubtful cast, and their very imperfections blended with amiable dispositions, and not without some share of goodness.

ACTUATED by so many motives, sometimes the slave of appetite and passion, and sometimes of weakness, folly and caprice ; at one time resolute to withstand temptation, at another falling an easy victim ; now urged on by fear and now withheld by shame ; to-day, the foster-child of reason and religion, and to-morrow seeking nothing but the friendship of the world, man is often a stranger to himself.

YES, so far are we from being able to penetrate into the recesses of our neighbour's bosom, that we are never fully conscious of the many latent springs of action, the many evil propensities, lumbering affections and hidden frailties, that are lodged and cherished in our own. It was from a conviction of this truth, that the Psalmist, in the words of the text, asked, " Who
" can understand his errors ?" and in a devout petition, addressed to the Almighty, said, " Cleanse thou me from secret faults.
" Try me, O God, and seek the ground
" of my heart ; prove me and examine my
" thoughts.

“ thoughts. Look well if there be any
“ way of wickedness in me, and lead me
“ in the way everlasting.”

BUT though this is a subject on which, as on all others, we must confess the imperfection of human knowledge, yet it must be owned that, by diligent and serious attention, by “ communing with our own hearts,” and pursuing the means which divine revelation hath proposed, we can understand many of those errors and secret faults which corrupt virtue, and which in some measure, render our duty to God and man unacceptable and vain.

BY “ secret faults” we may suppose that David means either such as we are not fully sensible of ourselves, or such as are studiously concealed from the world. In discoursing therefore on this subject, I shall endeavour, first, to recommend the duty and importance of examining into our latent imperfections, and then it may be proper to point out some of those errors to which we

ourselves are apt to be blind, and some of those secret faults which we wish to conceal from others.

HABITS of virtue and habits of vice are acquired gradually. It is to be lamented, indeed, that the growth of evil should be more rapid than the progress of goodness; but we may lay it down as an established maxim, that no one ever became abandoned at once; or attained the summits of virtue, without much self-denial, frequent mortification, and endeavours patiently repeated. We are in a great measure the children of discipline; and the sooner this discipline commences, the better and more effectual will it be. “We must run the
“ race that is set before us;” we must expect to find many impediments in our progress, and many allurements that will tempt us to wander from our path. At our first onset, therefore, we should, if possible,
“ be from without and from within to all
“ temptation armed.”

THE temptations that meet us in the open day are palpable and evident. They offer themselves as undisguised foes ready to enslave us or retire: but those which are from within, which spring up in our own bosoms, and which follow us into all our retirements, are of a more secret, and, perhaps, more dangerous nature. These are of almost every evil deed the parent and the nurse. Let the man who has been guilty of what he now repents, examine into the state of his mind, previous to his transgression, and he will find that some secret disorder had crept into his imagination, some evil propensity had given birth to irregular desires, or some artifice of self-love had blinded his reason, and silenced "the still, small voice" of conscience.

THE duty, therefore, of attending to our "secret faults," is of the last importance, since its object is the preservation of innocence and the prevention of guilt. For this great end, we are ordered not only to

avoid the actual commission of sin, but to “abstain from all appearance of evil; and He, who best knew our infirmities, and who best could help them, has commanded us to “Watch and pray, lest we “enter into temptation.”

IF we expect that our minds should resemble that good ground in the gospel, “which brought forth fruit an hundred fold,” we must take care to bestow proper cultivation on them. If we slumber our time away in careless negligence, or heedless sloth, there are at all times enemies enough to sow tares among our wheat, and other weeds of noxious quality will spring up in abundance, of spontaneous growth.

EVERY vice has its beginning, and every evil habit may date its origin and progress, from some vicious indulgence. It is of the utmost consequence, therefore, to guard the avenues of the heart, that we may prevent every wish, if possible, from entering there,

there, that might disturb our peace and ultimately lead us into guilt.

IT is dangerous, and often fatal, to cherish the delusions of fancy; to welcome every desire that seems to promise pleasure, from a vain confidence that we can retreat, whenever we perceive danger.—If we acted wisely, we should, as seldom as possible, risk the hazard of a battle, knowing the traitors that often lurk in our own bosoms, and that the arms which we can now wield in our defence might, by the perversion of sin, be turned against us. Thousands have erred against conviction and been lost, from trusting too much in their own strength; or, like the unhappy Peter, have had sufficient reason to “weep bitterly.”

ON this, therefore, as on every other occasion, when we would know our duty, let us deeply impress our minds with the excellency and truth of divine Revelation, which tells us to “flee temptation,” and

warns every man, who “thinks he standeth, to take heed, lest he fall.”

IN order to avoid “the sin which doth so easily beset us,” the first step certainly is to endeavour to UNDERSTAND our errors; and when we examine into the disorders of the passions, the deceitfulness of the imagination, and the depravity of self-will, we shall have abundant cause to pray to the Almighty that he would “cleanse us from secret faults.”

ANOTHER motive that should urge us to the speedy and effectual performance of this duty, is the consideration that, at no future period, we can do it with equal advantage. The time that is past is gone for ever—God knows how small a portion we have yet to come—surely not enough to warrant the indulgence of evil, or to excuse the folly of indolent security. With many of us, no doubt, “the day is far spent and “the night of death is at hand, in which “no man can work.” By some, therefore,

fore, the season of this religious discipline might be deferred till the opportunity of practising it is lost; and to all that procrastinate the time of reformation, duty becomes more painful, and error more confirmed.

MEN, for the most part, act not thus in their worldly affairs. If they had some favorite spot of land which it was their interest and duty to cultivate and adorn, would they suffer it from neglect to run to ruin, to be overspread with weeds and covered with brambles, for want of a little labor timely employed? Would they not rather watch the springing of every noxious and unfruitful plant and destroy it as it rises? Were we to bestow the same attention in order to discover and understand our errors, we might expect from it the most pleasing and beneficial effects. Instead of vice and disorder, of sin and corruption exercising their dominion over us, we might hope to experience the satisfactions of godliness, and
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the serenity which results from order, security and peace.

BUT let us now endeavour to point out some of those secret faults to which we ourselves are apt to be blind, or, at least, inattentive. It would, perhaps, be impossible to enumerate the various causes of self-delusion and to exhibit the deceitfulness of sin under its many different and complicate disguises. Among the more general, however, we may justly rank pride, vanity and self-love. There are doubtless a thousand corrupt biases that occasionally influence the mind, but the greater part of them will be found, on examination, to be the offspring or the kindred of these three passions; passions which are certainly the most abundant sources of error, and of those secret faults to which the Psalmist may be supposed to allude. Such is the imperfection of language, such are the false glosses which the mind will throw over its own deformity, when intent only on the gratification of its desires; and such indeed is
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the unsettled nature of many virtues among men, unless we have reference to the will of God in order to form our principles and estimate our conduct, that we often hear vices dignified with the name of good qualities, and many christian graces degraded into weaknesses, or avoided as errors.

THE mean, rapacious wretch, who, instead of assisting the widow and the orphan, will embrace every opportunity of plundering them, to gratify his avarice, may, from the delusions of vice and the misrepresentations of self-love, persuade himself that frugality and temperance, industry and provident wisdom are the virtues which distinguish his character. He thinks not of fraud and extortion, but dwells only on those kindred qualities to which his vices are allied.

FROM the same hidden corruption of the heart and blindness of the understanding, the furious bigot and the wild enthusiast will condemn the warm, but steady devotion

devotion of the rational christian, and deem him only fit for heaven, who fights for trifles, and thinks nothing worthy of his belief, but what others cannot understand. Who is there, also, that has not seen an haughty, overbearing pride, endeavouring to pass itself on the world for personal dignity, and a looseness of principle and conduct concealed under the specious terms of "liberality of sentiment and independent spirit?" While the meekness and gentleness of christians, their long-suffering and humility, have been scandalized by the scoffers of the world, as meanness and pusillanimity.

IF we wish to discover the corrupt source of these lamentable evils, we must often examine our own hearts with serious and steadfast attention. We must review the many internal sentiments that occasionally rise in our minds, to cherish or to check the passions. Not even the wanderings of the imagination should escape us; for these often prove the parents of desire, and at length

length become the directors of our conduct. But above all things, we should attend to the nature and the grounds of our satisfactions and pleasures, our griefs and vexations, in the intercourse we carry on with the world.

IF you are ready at all times to listen with delight to the fulsome tale of the sycophant and flatterer, but hear with painful attention the wholesome and sincere remonstrance of a friend; if you can forego your own sense of moral rectitude for what the world may call propriety or fashion; or, if you can sacrifice the obligations of virtue and of truth for the mere desire of pleasing, or of being pleased; be assured that VANITY is among the number of those secret faults which are ever ready to deceive you and lead you into evil. If in associating with your fellow-creatures, you are eager for precedence, jealous of honor, mortified at every trifling neglect, and like Haman, who could not endure to see Mordecai sit in the king's gate without doing

him homage, always ready to exact the mere formalities of deference and courtesy from others, you need not doubt but that **PRIDE** is among the corrupt passions that are cherished in your bosoms. And, if in the exercise of your benevolence, you “do good” only to those who can do good to you;” if when you give alms you are ready to sound your trumpet before you in the streets; or, if your friendship is to be gained only by soothing your weaknesses, flattering your foibles and promoting your pleasures; you need not hesitate to conclude, that among other secret faults, **SELF-LOVE** of the most sordid nature has taken full possession of your hearts.

THESE errors and imperfections, evident as they sometimes must be to others, are often concealed from ourselves; but serious meditation on the distinct subjects which have been already noticed might disclose them to us; and, under the assistance of that divine spirit which helpeth our infirmities, might enable us to correct them.

LET us now briefly consider those secret faults which we industriously keep from the eyes of the world. These must be of greater magnitude than the former, because they necessarily imply hypocrisy and practical falshood. To be deceived through indolence, or from the neglect of fulfilling the measure of duty required of us, is bad enough ; but to be instrumental in deceiving others is worse. How often are the most selfish views and principles concealed under the specious form of courtesy, and, I may say, the wicked affectation of christian gentleness ! Even mirth and good-humour are sometimes cloaks to vice. The petty, domestic tyrant will meet his midnight associates with such satisfaction and delight, such enlivening joy and unrestrained pleasure, that it is impossible to suspect the cruelty and oppression that are daily practised at home.

MANY also are such mere slaves to the world, that we may trace almost every action of their lives to the fear of offending,

ing, or the desire of pleasing men. I am afraid that worldly-mindedness sometimes goes so far as to the regulation of religious practice. Some there are who, were they to examine their own hearts, would find, perhaps, that the interests of this world had no inconsiderable share in settling their creed, and in leading them at stated periods to the temple of God, when no sentiments of piety warmed their hearts.

MANY too will catch the flying tale of slander, and tell it with malignant pleasure, that others may infer their innocence or integrity, from their abhorrence of their neighbour's frailty. Nay, this groveling spirit of the world has occasionally corrupted the amiable virtues of charity and beneficence. The sick have been provided with an asylum, the poor have been relieved, and the friendless protected from motives of vanity, pride or interest, when pity was never felt and the obligations of religion never thought of. We contemplate these actions, however,
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with some degree of pleasure, because we consider them as involuntary tributes of honor from VICE to VIRTUE ; and further, because we view in them traces of that divine wisdom which can produce GOOD from EVIL.

YET those who take no care to cleanse themselves from errors of this sort, are under a state of the most wretched bondage to the world. All is sacrificed to appearance. The passions, indeed, may be often mortified and suppressed, though not from a sense of religious duty, (for then it would be virtue) but from “ respect of persons,” or the fear of losing some advantage. Men who are thus wedded, as it were, to sin, are often as cruel and oppressive, as they are selfish and hypocritical. Though they cringe to power, and flatter to deceive, yet they frequently retire from the insults and vexations of the world within the circle of their respective authority, and vent their angry and malignant passions with redoubled vehemence and malice.

IN order to correct these evils, and all other imperfections that are incident to sinful mortals, let us consider that we live and act under the eye of Omniscience. Soon will this transitory life be past, and soon will that Supreme Being from whom no secrets are hid, bring to light the works of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart. When the awful moment shall arrive, in which the body shall return to dust, and the spirit into his hands who gave it, little will it avail us to have pleased such perishable beings as ourselves, however distinguished for their wealth or power here, if we have offended that almighty, but all-gracious Power, in whose hands are the issues of life and death !

You, therefore, who are what the apostle calls “pleasers of men,” who sometimes abstain from evil, and sometimes embrace it, in order to maintain your influence in the world, learn to be virtuous on higher authority, and reject the solicitations to evil

in the sure and steadfast hope of far more transcendent rewards. A time will shortly come when we shall be convinced that there is but "one thing needful," which is the mercy and protection of God. If we wish to anticipate that awful moment when the alarming truths of religion shall be forced on our minds by the threatening approach of death, we must remember that the omniscient Creator is not to be served as we serve the world. We must love HIM with all our hearts, and we must worship him in spirit and in truth. But those who serve the world, like those who serve other capricious tyrants, often hate their masters, and, in moments of reflection, despise themselves.

BESIDES, we can carry on a sort of double intercourse with the world, and promote our own interest and pleasure, while we indulge the most depraved passions of our nature. Men weak and ignorant like ourselves, are to be blinded and deceived, and need not know our secret faults. But

the plan of providence by which the universe is governed, would be very defective, were they to pass unnoticed. We may, indeed, retire far from the observation of men, into the shades of night, we may shut ourselves up within walls that would exclude the rays of the noon-tide sun, or the lightning that darts from heaven; but never can we withdraw ourselves from that all-pervading Spirit, from whom “the darkness hideth not; but the night shineth as the day.”

SOME may complain in this life of the attacks of slander and detraction, but they do not often reflect on the many hidden crimes which the eye of the world never saw, and the many evil thoughts and wicked intentions, which lie beyond the power of human knowledge, or human MALICE to discover. When summoned to appear before the eternal Judge to give an account of the things done in our body, if our consciousness extends to the recognizance of each other in a future state, how shall we be
astonished

astonished at our neighbour's secret faults, and terrified at the recital of our own! Among other hidden works of darkness, we might see the mask of false friendship drop off, and the vile sycophant, or insidious foe appear. What we once thought humility might even assume the form of pride, and he that pretended to superior sanctity of manners, might, in the sight of God, prove to be a hypocrite and deceiver.

THE fashion and the appearance of this world will be so strangely reversed, that among many good and faithful servants that are worthy to enter into the joy of their Lord, we shall see some whose merits we thought highly of shrink from the awful trial of the last day, and vanish like smoke before the wind; while the meek and humble virtues of those whom we neglected, or perhaps despised, shall shine forth like the sun in his kingdom.

LET the prospect, therefore, of this awful scene teach us to cultivate the favor of the Deity as the most glorious and distinguished privilege that this life affords. To the regular and uniform performance of every christian duty, let us, instead of indulging the mean and paltry gratifications of self-love, unite that simplicity and godly sincerity which the holy gospel every where teaches. Both in our conversation with the world and in our duty towards God, let us walk openly and honestly “as in the day;” then, when this frail tenement shall be about to be dissolved, we may say, with humble confidence, in the language of the apostle, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge shall give me, and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”

S E R M O N XVI.

O N I D L E N E S S.

E Z E K. xvi. 49.

—*Abundance of Idleness was in her.*

AMONG the many atrocious crimes that rendered the devoted city of Sodom infamous, and at length brought it to destruction, the holy prophet ranks the vice of IDLENESS. Pride, selfishness and luxury, it appears, had spread corruption through the people ; and when IDLENESS was added to the catalogue, the harvest of iniquity must have been full, and of the rankest growth.

OF the various evils to which mankind are subject, some are sufficient by their violence to rouse the powers of the mind, and put us on our guard; others might, by the goodness of God, counteract their own progress, by the speedy misery and pain which they often inflict; but few steal upon the soul with such fatal security, and deprive us at once of dignity, of happiness and virtue, as IDLENESS. To active crimes that annoy the peace of others, even the most hardened sinner is forced to be awake; but against the still, corroding vices of the heart, that chiefly affect ourselves, we are seldom guarded, except by the voluntary exercise of our own reason, or the friendly admonitions of others.

I SHALL endeavour, therefore, to state some of the many motives that ought to make us shun IDLENESS, as the silent corrupter of the heart; and by shewing how its pernicious influence extends to almost every social and religious duty, warn you of its misery and guilt.

IF we look up to the great Creator as to the source of all perfection, and contemplate his wisdom and his goodness in his works, we shall find, that no living example of Idleness, or inactivity, is ordained by his providence. All seem “WORKING” “together,” and gradually fulfilling some beneficent purpose which He has appointed. From the endless changes and combinations which material substances undergo, we may direct our attention to the silent, but active powers of vegetation; from vegetation we may ascend to animals, some toiling only to preserve life; and others with higher instincts, or more useful powers, laboring for the comfort and convenience of man. From them we may raise our thoughts to the resplendent orbs that roll with ceaseless motion through the regions of unbounded space, measuring out the seasons, months and years; nay we may “lift up our hearts” to the Almighty Father himself, as constantly impressing the whole universe by the ACTIVE energy of his power, without
which,

which, all its laws and all its motions would in an instant cease.

WHILE the face of nature presents us with this general scene of action, shall man remain, in contradiction to the will of heaven, in the rest and sloth of Idleness? Nothing could degrade him more in that scale of being where he holds so distinguished a rank. Were he in a state of nature, a considerable exertion of his animal powers would be requisite to procure him food, and shelter him from the inclemency of the seasons: and though in civilized society, the drudgery of providing “those things which are needful for the body” chiefly falls on the poor, yet that is no reason why any member of the community should indulge himself in Idleness. There are active duties allotted to every human being, and the fulfilling of them with cheerfulness and diligence, should form the most considerable portion of our happiness.

WHILE

WHILE some are assiduously providing for their own household by following their respective avocations, others may be engaged in laudable attempts to extend the boundaries of science, and increase the comforts of social life ; while many are anxiously employed in protecting the helplessness of infancy and forming the manners of childhood ; a few whom fortune has placed above these humble duties, might fill the offices of state with advantage, and by their industry, their virtues and their wisdom, greatly contribute to the general welfare.

THERE is no plea therefore for IDLENESS. Even Adam, while in Paradise, was not intended to be wholly exempt from labor ; for we are expressly told, that “ The Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden, to DRESS it, and to KEEP it.” In the present state of society, all have their parts assigned them, and out of an almost infinite variety, every one may chuse that which is best suited

sued to his inclination, his circumstances and powers.

LIFE, indeed, abounds with so many duties, there are so many difficulties to overcome, so many wants to supply, and so short a time to do it in, that a wise man, who is interested for others as well as himself, laments, after exerting himself to the utmost, that he has not been enabled to do half the good he intended; and that of the variety of objects which he thought within his reach, he could obtain so very few. There is not, therefore, a more insignificant, worthless character, than the man who lives without employment, who has no fixed pursuit, no regular course of duties to fulfil; but who wanders from one idle, and perhaps vicious, gratification to another, and often hunts, with weariness and languor, for expedients to kill time. Happy would it be if such men could be considered as mere blanks in creation; or drones that consume what should feed others,

others, without making any adequate return; but such is the natural and restless activity of the human mind, that he who omits to do what is right, is in the greatest danger of learning to do what is wrong. To toil up the steep of virtue, requires the union of industry and fortitude; but even the idle man may lapse into vice, by a sort of intellectual gravity, that tends insensibly to sink him.

IN a state of indolence are engendered many evils and many sorrows. Among the lower classes of the community, Idleness is productive of misery and guilt in every varied form. If we could trace out the source of those crimes and depredations, which daily infest society, we should find many of them originate from this degrading vice. Hence it is that such numbers, who, by honest industry and the blessing of health, might have enjoyed every substantial comfort that life affords, are sunk into a state of the most abject poverty and want. Too idle to labor, and by their distresses cut
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off from many opportunities of employment ; often pinched with hunger and with cold, and yet not proper objects of charity, they are easily led to break through the barrier of honesty ; and then crimes and iniquity abound, till the last scene of guilt closes with public infamy and death. The ties of every duty, indeed, will be but slightly felt by him who gives himself up to Idleness ; his predominant vice gradually undermines his principles, and spreads licentiousness through his character ; his soul is for ever thirsting after some gratification which he knows not how to obtain, and it is always his peculiar misfortune to feel more wants than his industrious neighbour, though he has less power to remove them.

IF a man of this description have a family, all bred up under the contagious influence of his vices, it is impossible to tell how far and wide the stream of corruption will spread. So much is Idleness to be dreaded in its consequences when it infects the poor.

IF we consider those of middle life, who might be said to possess the object of Agur's prayer, and to have "neither poverty nor riches," we shall perceive the same vice diffusing its miseries. Under the pleasing delusion of comfort and of ease, we might observe some quitting the active scenes of life, which habit had rendered familiar, and almost natural, in pursuit of happiness in retirement. But it is not every mind that is formed, or prepared for the enjoyment of solitude. To those who have been long engaged in the business and bustle of the world, it often becomes particularly irksome. Few that retire in this manner carry with them a mind disposed to meditation; or furnished with sufficient knowledge to render it at once profitable and pleasing. Few promise to themselves the sublime and uninterrupted comforts of religion; and many have no taste either for rural pleasures, for the beauties of nature, or the pursuits of science.

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UNDER such circumstances solitude becomes a burden ; and a state of retirement degenerates into a state of Idleness. A languid discontent and a peevish neglect of ordinary comforts soon lead to sensuality and excess of every kind. Self-indulgence is the last idol of the heart, and the short remnant of life is often divided between the feebleness, or pain of disease, and the stupors of intoxication.

To those who may not be in danger of gross and sensual vices, Idleness still brings distresses that ought to be dreaded. If temptation from the body should be resisted, it is sure to fasten on the mind, The human frame is so constituted as to require frequent alternations of action and of rest. The animal functions cannot be properly performed without them ; and how these affect the mind is well known. It may be remarked, however, that even excess of labor is not so injurious as excess of ease. Many, indeed, are forced, in a
great

great measure, by the sedentary occupations with which the present state of society abounds, to sacrifice the benefits of exercise. The temperance which necessity often imposes on them might be some substitute for these, and the slight attention requisite for manual labor, without harassing, might be sufficient to engage the mind ; yet when we consider, that, after all, a scanty subsistence only is obtained, we cannot help feeling for them the emotions of pity and compassion.

BUT there are many who voluntarily seek indulgence in that listless inactivity and sedentary ease, which others justly consider as the peculiar hardship of their station. This, therefore, deserves not to be attributed to any better cause than the love of Idleness : and if we reflect on the melancholy consequences that flow from it, we shall be fully warranted in the harshness of the appellation. For want of exercise and air, the human frame unavoidably contracts such extreme delicacy, as to be susceptible of the slightest injury : and

yet injuries it must bear ; for one caution and indulgence, beyond the rules of ordinary prudence, only renders another necessary ; till at length we might resemble the effeminate Sybarite, who was annoyed by the rose-leaves that were scattered on his couch. Hence, the constitutions of those who are by nature delicate and weak, are enfeebled by lingering disease ; and that health is often imperceptibly destroyed, which might be even dearer to others than themselves. Thus is weakness and disease often propagated from generation to generation : and from this cause more than from any other, the fond mother is now, almost without exception, in the higher stations of life, rendered incapable of fulfilling the most natural and pleasing of all maternal duties, that of nurturing her own offspring.

BESIDE these general and substantial evils, there flows a profusion of sorrow and distress from the same source. In proportion as the body is nursed in luxuriant Idleness, the mind generally acquires a sort of
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painful activity. Exempt from every important calamity, it seizes on some imaginary evil, as the food for melancholy discontent, or tinges every blessing which life affords with the shades of artificial misery. Hence, that sensibility which would have given interest and fervor to every benevolent affection, which would have rendered the domestic duties a source of pleasure, and spread delight through the circle of its influence, often degenerates into a sickly weakness, or irritability of mind, that is equally incapable of communicating, and receiving happiness.

IDLENESS, indeed, compleatly disqualifies us for every rational enjoyment. One chief pleasure in human life is the blessing of repose after fatigue, or the relaxation of amusements, either solitary or social, after labor. But these to the IDLE are like food to one whose appetite is already cloyed. They cannot properly relish any comfort; for where there is no stated employment to engage the attention, there will be always

something wanting : and to the disorders of a mind rejecting ordinary satisfactions, averse to common duties, and roving in the wild regions of ideal pleasure, may we not often attribute the vices that loosen the bands of conjugal fidelity, and the public infamy that precedes divorce? To the same causes, united with a disposition too proud to endure poverty, and too idle to remove it, we may sometimes ascribe that listless indifference to character and propriety of conduct, those vain imaginations and idle dreams of happiness, which have corrupted the minds of thousands, and rendered them almost the WIL-
LING slaves of seduction and licentiousness.

IT is among those, also, who in a state of IDLENESS are preyed on by roving thoughts, and bewildered in the miseries of imagination ; those who having no fixed principles to regulate the passions, can call the whole force of the mind to kindle every disappointed hope and mortified desire to madness ; in short, it is among those, chiefly, who have LEISURE to be wretched, that

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we find the miserable victims of suicide and insanity.

It would be impossible to trace out the various evils that may be said to spring from Idleness, and that affect the peace and happiness of men, through all the gradations of social life. It may be sufficient to have pointed out some of the most obvious; and to remark, that its general tendency is to undermine the principles of virtue, to destroy cheerfulness and health, to poison the mind with fictitious sorrows, and to render it inattentive to the most important duties; to cut off entirely the high relish of enjoyment, which the industrious experience from occasional relaxation; and, in a word, to render the whole man, poor, discontented, contemptible and wretched.

LET me earnestly exhort you, therefore, to guard against a vice whose pernicious influence is so extensive, and whose consequences ought to be so much dreaded. Whatever be your situation, reason and re-

ligion will point out to you some scheme of duties appropriated to it, which it should be at once your interest and pleasure to fulfil. Life abounds also with such frequent opportunities of doing good, or improving time, that no part of the small portion which remains, should be squandered away in trifles: for next to the vice of Idleness is that of employing time amiss. The man of pleasure may suppose, that he has nothing to answer for on this account, because his station exempts him from labor and application; and therefore he freely squanders life away in frivolous amusements and fashionable excesses: but religion would tell him, that all have their talent given them to husband and improve; that the wise Creator meant not that a being endowed like man, with a reasonable soul, should be worse than a blank amidst his works; and that if he enjoys the full exercise of his powers and the uninterrupted use of time; “to him much has been given, and therefore much will certainly be required.” It is fortunate, indeed, for
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the generality, that many of the active duties are forced on them by necessity; for those who have it in their power to do what they please, always do the least; and soon find the ardor of voluntary pursuits gradually subside, till it is wholly lost in a passion for pleasure, or the love of ease.

It often happens, that the most industrious men, those who estimate the value of time by the advantages which they have gained, and the improvements which they might still make, will accuse themselves of Idleness; while others suffer days, weeks and years to glide unprofitably away, without any self-condemnation or regret.

MANY, also, are always INTENDING to do something more than they have done; but in reality do little, or nothing. They are in the habit of squandering away small portions of time daily as insufficient for their purpose, or as not deserving their regard, without considering that life, for the most part, is made up of nothing else. Every day brings with

it its wants, its duties and avocations; it must of necessity, therefore, be divided, and subdivided; and though any single ordinary remnant, if devoted to improvement, might appear trifling; yet when collectively taken, at a year's end, they would be found truly important.

IN addition, therefore, to all the other arguments which might be adduced against Idleness, consider, that from the diligent improvement of time every thing that is great and good must proceed. Whether your object be professional eminence and fame, the increase of fortune, of knowledge, or of power, this is the grand condition, on which the wise Creator hath ordained it should be originally acquired.

BUT on this, as on most other occasions, the example of our blessed Lord will afford us the most salutary lesson. What unwearied diligence did he not exercise in his human capacity; what labors, trials and distresses did he not undergo, in
order

order to accomplish the grand work of our redemption! Though he often had not where to lay his head, yet his life was one continued "labor of love." He went about from house to house and village to village doing good, and working, with pious fidelity, the will of Him that sent him. When we consider the short period to which his divine ministry was confined, the frequent journeyings he performed from one part of Judea to another; when we reflect on the variety of knowledge he revealed, and the innumerable multitudes to whom he personally communicated it; when we remember his preaching in public, and his exhortations in private, his many miracles of love, and the assiduity with which he visited the sick and relieved the wretched; we cannot but regard his life as exhibiting the brightest pattern of active goodness, and as the strongest condemnation of Idleness and sloth.

I NEED not dwell on the industrious zeal of his holy apostles in general, nor of St.
Paul

Paul in particular. You know the active diligence of his ministry ; his unwearied labors in different parts of the world ; the difficulties he encountered, and the perils to which he was exposed by sea and land, and, what was still worse, by “ false brethren.” If we add to these his earnest exhortations when present, and his elaborate epistles when absent, to the different churches which he had planted, we may be convinced, that the great apostle of the Gentiles fulfilled his ministry with the most active and unremitting diligence. But even this was not sufficient ; for that he might not be chargeable to the infant church of his heavenly Master, he filled the short intervals of time, which he could spare from his public office, by working at the business to which he had been bred. The success of his ministry was proportioned to his diligence and zeal. But how would he, or any of his holy brethren have fulfilled the sacred trust confided in them, if any thing like Idleness, or indifference, had taken possession of their souls ? In short,
nothing

nothing great can be accomplished, nothing praise-worthy can be achieved without industry. The idle man by neglecting, contemns the rich talent entrusted to his care, and hereafter will be reproved like the slothful servant who buried it in the ground. To him the beauties of creation are in a great measure lost, and the wisdom and the goodness of God have been revealed in vain. He seldom is impressed with gratitude, because he enjoys no blessing as he ought; and the grand object for which every rational being is content to pass through his probationary world, namely, the exaltation and improvement of his nature, as a preparatory step to a happier state of existence, is by him frustrated and destroyed.

Avoid Idleness, therefore, as the bane of happiness and the great corrupter of the soul. Cultivate industry, and diligently improve the small portion of time allotted to human life, from almost every motive that can interest and engage the heart of man; from a regard to cheerfulness and health;

health ; from the natural desire of knowledge, the love of excellence, and the enviable distinctions of power ; from the benevolent wish to communicate happiness and relieve misery ; and lastly, from an earnest desire of fulfilling the measure of duty required of us by the Almighty Father, and of “ so passing through things temporal, “ that we finally lose not the things “ eternal.”

S E R M O N X V I I .

O N I N F I D E L I T Y .

J O H N x i v . I .

—*Ye believe in God, believe also in me.*

FROM the exhortation in the text, and a variety of other passages that express the intimate union of our blessed Lord with the Father, we may learn that it is as necessary to believe the divine revelation which the Son of God came on earth to publish, as it is to believe in God himself. Every thing, indeed, concurs to produce this belief in the mind of a rational and good man; particularly the miracles
which

which he performed, the doctrines which he taught, and the heavenly example which his life exhibited. But to impress us with the deepest reverence for the heavenly Messiah, we are told, that “The Father judgeth
“ no man ; but hath committed all judg-
“ ment to the Son : that all men should
“ honor the SON even as they honor the
“ FATHER. He that honoreth not the
“ SON, therefore, honoreth not the FA-
“ THER which hath sent him.”

THE belief in God is, doubtless, the first principle of religion ; but, like all other principles, it is of little value unless applied to practice ; unless it be made the basis of piety, and the support of moral and religious duty. Of what consequence to us is the existence of a Supreme Being, if we are not taught the relation in which we stand to him ? If we admit not the idea of his providence ; if we believe not the soul immortal, and repose not on the divine attributes of his wisdom and his goodness for future happiness ?

Now,

Now, the gospel of Jesus Christ was particularly adapted to give us more enlarged ideas of the Almighty Father than could be acquired by the exercise of reason, and to teach us fully and circumstantially what we should believe and do, in order to promote our happiness here, and to secure the Divine Favor hereafter. Necessary as this knowledge is found to be from the wants and infirmities of man, from the consideration of his past ignorance and the experience of his present superiority, there are many even now, who content themselves with believing in God, and believe not in our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

IN discoursing therefore on the words of the text, it may not be improper to attempt to delineate the general features of Deism. A diligent and attentive survey of the characters of its professors, and of the probable motives that influence their conduct, may serve as an antidote to the poison of infidelity, and render us happy in the possession of our own principles.

IN

IN contemplating the nature of man we may observe, that the few intellectual qualities, which seem necessary for his happiness and dignity, are in a greater or less degree, common to the whole human race: they are the lofty distinctions of his rank in creation; they are the means by which he supports his superiority, and from which he derives his wisdom and his power. It is among these that we must number the rational faculty, or the intuitive perception, which taught men in all ages that there is a God, and gave them some sense of religion. For view the history of barbarous nations from the mountains of Patagonia to the Siberian deserts, and you will find, however savage and uncultivated in other respects, that they are all taught to look up to "Our Father who is in heaven," and united to him by the universal tie of religion.

To a truth, therefore, established on the general consent of all nations and ages the Deist of modern times assents, not that he
feels

feels it as the genuine principle of piety at his heart ; but because to disbelieve the existence of a God would betray a degree of folly, or perverseness, that borders on absurdity. His faith, however, might be truly said to be “ dead,” for generally, I believe, it has little more to do with the regulation of his conduct, than a belief in the velocity of light, or the infinite extension of space.

THE ancient Theists made their belief of the Supreme Being at least a practical principle ; they celebrated their festivals ; they regularly offered their sacrifices and performed their devotions. Though often led into acts of extravagance, and even cruelty, for want of further light than reason could afford, yet we have no cause to complain of their zeal and sincerity in worshipping the almighty Father in the best manner they could.

BUT the Deists of modern times, notwithstanding their profession of a more pure and philosophical faith, seem to live, as it were,

“ without God in the world.” We hear of no system of practical piety derived from their grand principle, in which they cordially unite ; no stated periods for social worship ; no habits of family prayer ; and, in short, nothing that indicates RELIGION to have any share in forming their sentiments, governing their passions, or regulating their lives. Deism, therefore, is a mere form of godliness without its power. From indefinite notions of the divine attributes, and sceptical opinions on the nature of man, it might be accommodated to every character, and made to quiet the conscience under the habitual practice of almost every vice.

WHEN we consider the positive precepts of christianity, in contrast with such a system as this, when we remember the clearness and authority with which it speaks against every vicious and corrupt principle in the human heart ; we need not wonder, indeed, that many have shrunk from the obedience of its laws, and taken refuge under the scanty shade of deistical opinions.

ACCOR-

ACCORDINGLY, it has been the complaint of good and conscientious christians in all ages, that apostacies were become frequent, or that unbelievers had multiplied : and from the numerous instances which fell under their own observation, they have successively imagined, that the times in which they lived were more disgraced by infidelity than those of their fore-fathers. Had this opinion been well-founded, which has come down to us from the early christian fathers, with the increasing experience of ages, we should before now have been all infidels; and the name of Christ would be no longer honored. But there is just ground to hope, that the blessings of the gospel are every year extending farther, and that the Sun of righteousness is dawning with purer lustre on those who had long “ sat in darkness “ and in the shadow of death.”

It is surely a mistaken opinion to suppose, that the glory of God, through the mediation of his blessed Son, is diminishing among men ; or that society, upon the

whole, abounds with more infidels now than at any former period. It is true we have more babblers in religion, more public scoffing and contempt, arising evidently from the glorious extension of liberty, and the mild restraint of penal laws. Good men, therefore, should refrain from these complaints; first, because they do not appear to be well-founded; secondly, because there are many WEAK christians, who would not wish to be thought singular, or to have the strong current of the world running against them; thirdly, as it serves to make many young persons in particular careless of their faith; and fourthly, as it feeds the vanity of infidels and sceptics, and gives them reason to triumph without any just cause.

BUT as there always have been, and still are, in these enlightened days, a great number of every description who profess themselves to be Deists, and others who assume no character at all, but that of not being christians; who without pretending to the subtilty of disputants, or indulging the licentious

centious ribaldry of libertines, are contented to move on in silent indifference with regard to others, I shall proceed in this, and in the following discourse, to lay open what I think the common sources of this infidelity, and point out the errors, the mischiefs and corruption with which it is blended.

THE first cause that I shall mention is negligence, or indolence. This indeed is so great with many, that it should appear as if they thought, that religion had nothing to do with them, nor they with religion. Its duties engross no portion of their time, and its interests claim not their regard. In public, they are compleatly occupied with some worldly pursuit or other; in private, they devote themselves to pleasure and enjoyment under the various forms of self-indulgence. Careless of their relation to the Supreme Being, and utter strangers to the exalted sentiments and principles that spring from the immortality of the soul, they think it sufficient to keep within the restraints of human

laws, and to cultivate only those prudent virtues, which are necessary to their comfort and advantage.

AND yet should we consider such men as confirmed infidels, or deists from conviction. By no means—they have no conviction—they never appear to think on the subject; and regard those who do, perhaps, as persons following the bent of their peculiar dispositions, as indulging the weakness of nature, or cherishing the salutary prejudices which they imbibed in their youth; and not as cultivating a duty of all others the most important, and whose obligations extend, with equal force, to the whole human race.

IT is strange that the concerns of eternity should dwell thus lightly on the mind, particularly when we consider either the shortness of life, the imperfection of all our enjoyments, or the awful hopes and fears which extend beyond the grave; and we might consider this as one of the most intricate problems in the study of human nature,

ture, if we did not observe that men are equally careless in other respects; if we did not see them, at times, inattentive to their own happiness and the happiness of others; if we did not see them sacrifice the blessings of health to the sordid enjoyments of sensuality and sloth; if we did not view them gradually sinking from a happy state of competence into poverty, misery and vice, to gratify a passion for pleasure and ostentation, or a ridiculous ambition; if we did not observe them blind to the real welfare of their own offspring; and, in short, from the same careless disposition, violating every important duty, and losing every substantial comfort in this life, as well as the prospects of eternal happiness in that which is to come.

OTHER causes that cherish “an evil heart of unbelief” are vanity and pride. There is something uncommonly captivating in the charm of novelty and distinction. Little minds catch at it on a thousand occasions by studiously departing from the practice of others. They can attract notice only by quitting the common paths

of life ; but great minds, if emulous of distinction among their fellows, can always secure it even though surrounded by a croud. It is a lamentable reflection, that religion should ever be made the subject for vanity and the prize of contention ; yet no affected candor should make us believe, that this has not driven many into the wide and barren fields of scepticism and infidelity.

THE Deist, indeed, can advance many plausible pretexts, that may have some influence with those who are actuated by kindred motives. He can amuse his imagination with the contemplation of popular superstitions and errors that are past ; he might compliment his understanding and sooth his vanity by pretending to comprehend a system of religion that is at once simple, clear and sublime ; he might think it very comfortable to form his sentiments merely on the contemplation of the divine attributes, and regulate his practice by what he thinks proper to call the moral sense, or the eternal fitness of things.

THESE,

THESE, indeed, are pleasing subjects for a philosophical reverie ; but can have little, or no influence on the government of conduct. None can be withheld from temptation by such vague and general principles, but those who having no strong passions to subdue, can practise the only virtues, perhaps, that they are taught to esteem, with as much complacency, as they trace the steps of a mathematical demonstration.

RELIGION to be the efficient handmaid of virtue must speak with precision and authority. She must teach us distinctly what to pursue as good, and what to abstain from as evil ; she must tell us all that is necessary to believe, to do, and suffer : the laws and opinions of men have only to do with external actions ; but her dominion must be established in the heart ; by awing the conscience it must prevent as well as punish sin ; it must begin long before the interposition of human authority becomes necessary, and extend much farther than that can ever reach. Unless religion does this,
it

it is imperfect, and fails of producing its proper effect.

Now, it is impossible that Deism should accomplish this. Nothing is there commanded or forbidden with sufficient authority. There is no end under such tenets, to the subterfuges of self-love; and men of the most opposite characters, with regard to morals, may unite under such a system, because it affords no clear and determinate pursuit of good. There is no prescribed form of duties, no grand object of attainment held out which all men, however different in other respects, might consider as the end of their endeavours and the consummation of their happiness. Therefore, every one would form his religion, if religion it might be called, agreeably to his own passions and pursuits; thus, instead of listening to the voice from heaven which would cleanse us from all iniquity, and teach us to worship the almighty Father in the beauty of holiness, men would embrace a few speculative tenets, that might
be

be made to foster their vanity and sanctify all their imperfections.

IF any one should ask on what grounds these conclusions are formed, we may answer, on the nature of the subject itself; on the selfish depravity of the human heart; on the practices and opinions of free-thinkers (as they are sometimes called) at present, and above all, on the striking experience of past ages. The ancient Theists though, in general, they steadfastly believed in God and the superintendence of his providence; though distinguished also for the acuteness and penetration of their reason, and many of them for their scientific researches, could by no means agree, after all their disquisitions, about the CHIEF GOOD which men ought to propose to themselves in this world. Some affirming it to be pleasure, others sensual indulgence; some thinking it consisted in exemption from pain, and others in living agreeably to nature; some determining, with equal confidence, that it ought to be knowledge, or virtue, and others that it should
be

be the union of these *. In short, all resolving on that which they liked best, and following what their passions and inclinations led them to.

I LEAVE every man, who possesses the free use of his reason, to judge of the efficacy of such a system to purify and exalt human nature, or to teach us how to worship God in spirit and in truth. Let us be contented to acknowledge, however frail and imperfect in performing the measure of our duty, that we are all agreed there is but "one thing needful," which is a blessed immortality, to be attained only by fulfilling the duties of a christian life,

BUT the freethinkers of modern times have greatly the advantage over the professors of ancient Theism. They can argue with more force, and explain with greater precision, both the positive and relative duties; however little they might think themselves bound to perform, they can expatiate in the fields of declamation,

* Lactantius iii. 7.

and adorn the virtues of humanity with eloquence derived from a purer source : for since “ the day-spring from on high hath visited us, the love of God has been shed abroad in the hearts of men ; ” the good seed hath produced its fruits ; though some, it is true, has been choked by thorns and briars, and some has fallen on stony places. But since the propagation of the holy gospel, many enormities in the lamentable history of human frailty have vanished, and many are still shrinking from its rising splendor, into the darkness from which they sprung. The abolition of slavery gradually took place in every country where christianity was established. Liberty and science, after the horrid devastation of Goths and Vandals, became more generally diffused. The barbarous spectacles of gladiators were no more exhibited, and the administration of justice became more mild and equal ; polygamy was forbidden ; the rights of men were more fully ascertained, and tribes of roving savages were formed into the more
peace-

peaceful and extensive associations, of states and kingdoms.

NOR must we forget to number the blessings which the celebration of our sabbath affords, among the glories of christianity; throughout whose wide domains every temple may be considered as a school of divinity, and a house of prayer. To these may be added the charitable protection and paternal care, which the christian church extended to the children of heathens; the many benevolent institutions that have been formed for the wretched of every description; the mitigation of the cruelties of war and the increase of the blessings of peace. In short, it was under the holy influence of our Redeemer's laws, that the amiable virtues of charity and humility reached the heart, and will, I trust, hereafter knit us all together in the bands of brotherhood, under the providence of our common Father and our God.

IN these extensive benefits the pupil of infidelity has his share ; but arrogantly attributes them to the light of nature, the wisdom of experience, and the gradual advancement of civilized society. Thus would he take from christianity her chief honor among men and yet deny her power. Thus would he pluck from the fair spreading tree of revealed religion its choicest fruit, and graft it on the barren stock of Deism, or Infidelity.

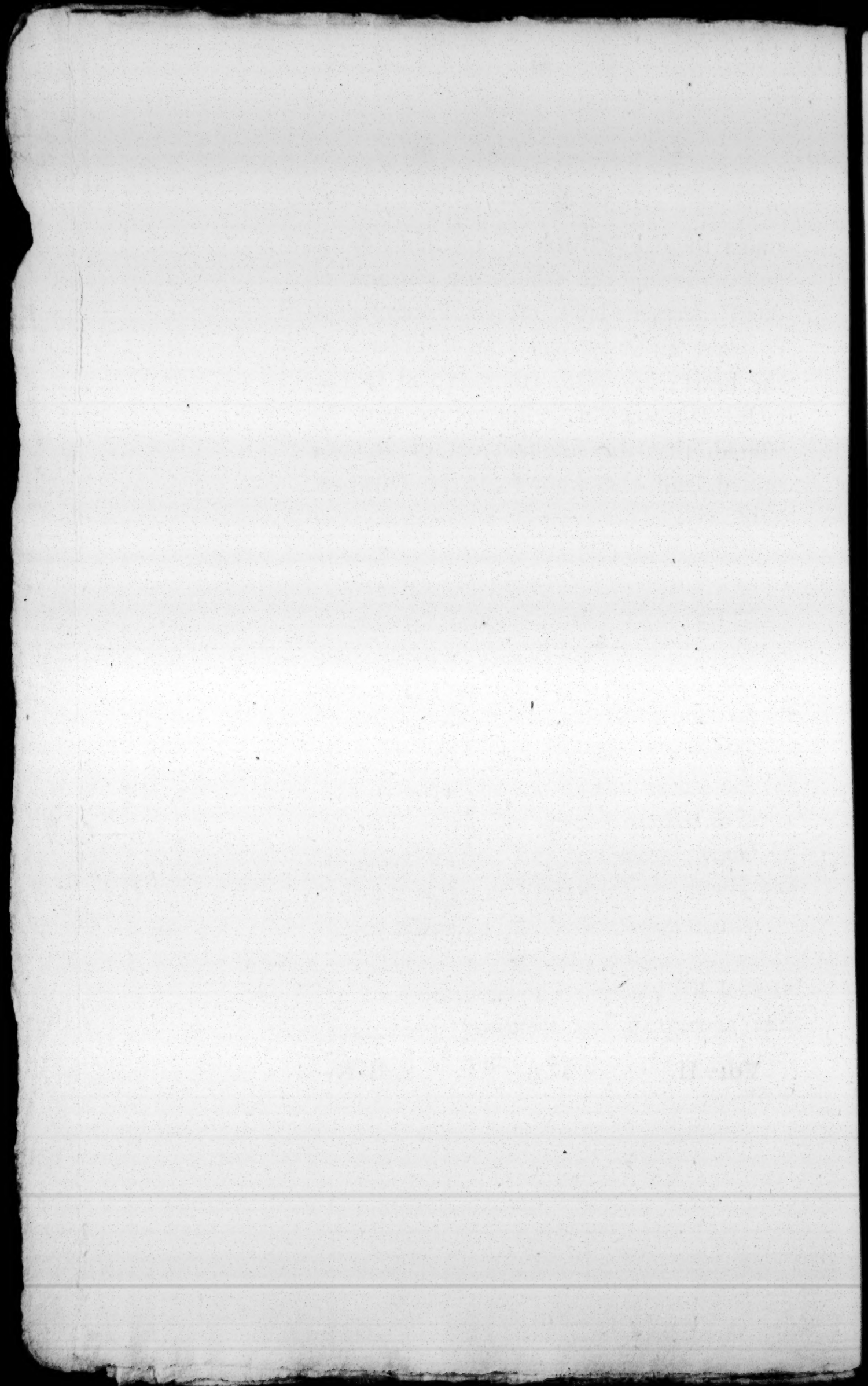
BUT unfortunately for him, the light of nature had reached its meridian splendor, and experience had time sufficient to reach its full maturity, long before many of these benefits and blessings began to appear. The ancients were undoubtedly our superiors in every art that properly falls within the sphere of genius, or indicates the refinements of taste. And if some of the philosophers could write on the moral duties with such force and eloquence as their pages still discover, what would they not have done if they had possessed the advantages of divine revelation ? The truth is, they neither wanted precepts

nor motives, such as the mere light of nature could discover, but they wanted sanctions to enforce them. The body of the people could not be reformed by hearing one fallible man confute another, or by the varying dogmas of Grecian philosophy: they wanted to be taught by authority; and that authority, indeed, one of the wisest of their sages told them must come from heaven.

HENCE then arose the office of the Messiah, and the establishment of his kingdom. Let not the disputers of this world, therefore, ascribe the mighty works which he performed, and the benefits which he has extended to us, to the sufficiency of human reason, nor deceive himself so far as to imagine that he, or society, would be what it is, if the Saviour of the world had never taken up his abode among men.

THE delusions of vanity and self-love are sufficiently powerful and dangerous with the best of human beings. Though living
under

under the habitual fear of offending God, and admitting the wholesome restraint of our Redeemer's laws, often will they tempt us from our duty, and pour disorder into the heart; but when they extend to the awful sanctions of religion, we may be assured, that the fountain of life is corrupted, and the knowledge of salvation lost.



S E R M O N XVIII.

O N I N F I D E L I T Y.

J O H N xiv. i.

—*Ye believe in God, believe also in me.*

T H E R E are no dispositions of mind productive of more general evil than those which teach us to regard our fellow-creatures with sentiments of inferiority. They always engender the most uncharitable prejudices, and often lead to acts of injustice and oppression. From the same source originate those habits of arrogant contempt, which stifle the principles of christian benevolence, and that supercilious

baseness which contracts the heart into selfishness.

To correct this ruling depravity among men, the Saviour of the world inculcated the virtues of humility and brotherly love with peculiar force. He knew, indeed, that they had an inseparable connection; for without descending from the lofty eminence of self-love to the level of humanity, who can practise virtue from proper motives, or shew himself the real friend of man? Vanity and pride create a thousand fanciful distinctions to which we have no just claim. However weak and however vicious, there are many, like the boasting Pharisee, who thank God that "they are not as other men are;" and who, instead of emulating the virtues of their superiors, can always find cause for insolence and exultation, while they behold a single wretch beneath them.

THE errors of judgment, also, to which these kindred passions lead are serious and alarming.

alarming. They always tend to diminish the obligations of benevolence, and to loosen the bands of social union. The proud man separates from his fellow-creatures, as from beings of an inferior order. As such he thinks of them ; as such he treats them.

HOWEVER harmless therefore the errors of OTHERS might occasionally be, HIS invariably tend to corrupt the heart. But on the present occasion, in prosecuting the subject of my last discourse, I shall consider their influence only as they relate to religion.

AMONG the many exemptions which vanity and pride would claim, is an exemption from the highest of all possible authority, the laws of God. Those divine sanctions which were intended to give strength where human power could not extend, and communicate happiness when the pleasures of the world are no longer enjoyed, the man of pride rejects. With apparent candor, perhaps, and self-complacency,

placency, he admits their salutary influence in restraining the vulgar, or comforting the weak, but puts in the haughty plea of self-sufficiency to excuse his own neglect. It is always a proof of great presumption, and often of folly, for any human being to arrogate to himself the post of eminence, and to break from those restraints to which he wishes others to submit. Even in a moral view, every one can see, that the discipline of christianity is necessary to teach such a man humility.

BESIDES, there is something extremely illiberal and unjust in viewing our fellow-creatures in this degrading light. The lowest wretch in creation would not be regarded with this mixture of pity and contempt. It is sufficient that the peculiar hardships of his station, perhaps, subject him to the task of daily labor: servitude as far as it relates to the body is painful enough, but when the selfish worldling attempts to fasten the shackles of policy on his mind, he revolts at the idea; however
frail

frail, he becomes jealous of his worth; however poor, he knows his importance; however weak, he feels his power, and glories in his common relation to the Father of all being.

THE truth is, that in respect of moral attainments, general utility, and principles of virtue, men throughout the various classes of society, are much more nearly on a level than is supposed. However they may differ in the powers of their minds, their acquisitions of knowledge, their exterior manners, their constitutional qualities and other respects, all, or at least some of all in every rank, are found capable of fulfilling the duties of a father and a friend in private life, and of a good citizen and subject in their public stations. They know also how to act for their temporal welfare and their future happiness; and as far as relates to practice, we might trust, perhaps, with more safety to the decisions of plain good-sense enlightened by experience, than to the professed casuist or the metaphysical

philosopher. Religion therefore is not called in to the aid of human institutions merely to give them the KNOWLEDGE of duty, but the POWER to fulfil it.

ALL men without exception have some infirmities to struggle with, some passions to subdue, and much self-denial to practise. Without the helps of religion none can do this successfully, or from such motives as they ought. Even under the united force of all the obligations that can arise from self-interest, virtue, policy, laws and religion, do we not see men of every rank in the habit of violating the most sacred duties? What cruelty and injustice then is it to withdraw from the deficient sum of moral motives, that which is of the most sacred nature, which is calculated to awe the conscience, and exists in all places and on all occasions!

BESIDES, for any man to persuade himself that religion is not of eternal, immutable and universal obligation, that its discipline

cipline and ordinances, though needful for others, are not so for him, is one of the most dangerous and guilty delusions that self-love can practise. Who is there that would in this sense consider himself among the vulgar? Fix upon the meanest wretch in creation, one that is a slave to every vicious indulgence, that is blinded by ignorance and polluted with guilt; select such a being from the community, and hint to him that religion is NECESSARY, but not TRUE, that it is of general, but not particular obligation, and he will reply that its restraints are not for him.

RELIGION, indeed, puts us all on the same level, as laboring in the same vineyard and serving the same Lord. Its commands, therefore, speak "to all that have ears to hear;" and no one will permit another to plead an exclusive privilege for neglecting those sacred duties by which he is bound. But the vain unbeliever would claim that exemption for himself, which to others he proudly and selfishly denies.

NEARLY connected with these corrupt biasses in our nature are an impatience of restraint and an ungovernable lust of power. There are no excesses in which the abuse of reason will not persuade some men that they may be permitted to indulge. Hence, whatever opposes their self-will, restrains their passions, or abridges their pleasures, they will silently invalidate, or publicly disavow. Instead of submitting to the holy discipline of religion, as the best means of enabling them to practise the important duty of self-denial, they think that no restraints are necessary for THEM, and limit their gratifications only by their power.

BUT yet they would have others in subjection; and under the pretence of liberty, resist authority only that they might share dominion. Whatever delusions self-love may weave into the minds of such men, with whatever degree of Pharisaical pride they may look down on their fellow-creatures, and how justly soever they may think themselves entitled to privileges which
others

others cannot claim, we need not hesitate a moment to pronounce, that the yoke of christianity, however galling, is more needful for them, than for the humble child of ignorance, whom they wish at once to govern and deceive. Indeed we may generally observe, that they who are most impatient of restraint most need it; and in proportion as men thirst for power, they for the most part abuse it. Hence liberty often degenerates into licentiousness, and authority into oppression.

It is not difficult to perceive how these haughty, but selfish dispositions, lead to infidelity, when religion becomes the subject of contemplation. How, for instance, can the ambitious slave of power listen to the meek, the humble and benevolent Saviour, when he says to him, "Take up thy cross
" and follow me?" Or how can the proud man, who feeds on the flatteries of self-love, and the humiliating views in which he sees his fellow-creatures, how can he forget his nature so far as to believe that

“ he came not to be ministered unto, but
“ to minister ?” How can he be cloathed
with that humility which teacheth us in
honor to prefer one another, or practise
that “ charity which vaunteth not herself,
“ and seeketh not her own ?” It requires as
much fortitude as to “ cut off a hand, or
“ pluck out an eye that offends them.”

OFTEN, therefore, instead of endeavour-
ing to correct their infirmities by submit-
ting to the laws of Christ, they shrink from
its authority, or lead a life of practical hy-
pocrisy by an empty profession of principles
that have no influence on their conduct.

ANOTHER stale plea for infidelity with
many is their inability to understand some
parts of revealed religion. If they aspire
to that perfect intelligence which is neces-
sary to investigate the dispensations of pro-
vidence from first to last ; if they expect to
comprehend fully the nature of the Deity,
the various modes of spiritual existence and
a thousand other mysteries, their disappoint-
ment

ment affords no rational objection to the truth of christianity, but exhibits rather a proof of the vanity and weakness of their own minds. They should consider, that the wisest of men can here “ know only “ in part.” Nor is this imperfection of knowledge confined to religion; there is not a single science in which we do not find our intellectual powers bounded, and all our acquisitions incomplete. It cannot be expected, therefore, that in religion, which comprizes the sublimest objects of contemplation, there should not be some particulars which we ought to receive with implicit submission, in deference to that authority by which they were revealed; and this is the province of faith.

BUT the proper question to all unbelievers on this ground is, “ Do not you “ understand all that is necessary for you to “ imitate by your conduct? Cannot you “ read in the example of Jesus the grand “ out-lines of duty, and as his law speaks “ to the conscience, with which if men “ preva-

“ prevaricate they only deceive themselves,
“ cannot you discover what ought to be
“ the rule and measure of your conduct in
“ the important exigencies of life? Do not
“ you understand, that christianity enjoins
“ you to practise humility, self-denial, justice,
“ temperance and charity? Are you
“ not taught, also, to cherish the most un-
“ bounded trust and confidence in the Supreme Being, that he will bestow life and
“ immortality, as the reward of obedience,
“ and as the fruit of prayer, thanksgiving
“ and praise?” These are the essential truths of religion, and these are made clear to all.

BUT many will neglect the only knowledge that is necessary “ to grow wise unto
“ salvation,” and complain that they do not understand the scriptures, without embracing the necessary MEANS of understanding them. To do this, indeed, requires more time, application and abilities than the generality possess. In the first place, an accurate and extensive knowledge of the original languages in which they were written

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ten is indispensably required. The varying sense of words must be carefully studied, as well as the peculiar phrases, idioms and proverbial expressions of the inspired writers. To this should be added the most perfect knowledge that ancient and modern literature can furnish of the country and the people, to whom "the glad tidings of "salvation" were first revealed. This should extend not only to their history and laws, but to their local situation, their manners, learning, prejudices, trade and customs.

If curiosity should extend to the origin and progress of ecclesiastical establishments, to the rise of different sects and the gradual increase of corruption, the student must submit to the tedious labor of collating manuscripts and examining editions. He must endeavour to detect the interpolations of fraud, and mark the omissions of ignorance. The voluminous works of the fathers must be studied with diligence, and the tedious
mazes

mazes of church-history must be explored with patient and unremitting labor.

For these pursuits it is evident a man must be a student by profession, and even then, life is much too short to obtain all that is to be acquired. But this extraneous knowledge is by no means necessary for christians in general. The labors of a few learned men have been found useful in illustrating the sense of scripture occasionally, in exposing the fallacies and corruptions of particular tenets, and adding to the body of external evidence in proof of christianity. But a *PASSION* for this kind of knowledge, has often drawn men from the essential duties of religion, and divided the christian church into wrangling heresies, or disgraced it by cruel persecutions. There are but few tenets necessary to salvation in the holy gospel, and they are sufficiently clear. To be over zealous, therefore, for trifles and matters of opinion, betrays not only a weak-

weakness of understanding, but generally includes a want of charity : and christianity, I believe, has been more essentially injured by the fury of polemics, the foolish credulity of its professors, and the intemperate zeal of its supposed friends, than by the hostile attacks of infidelity, or the imperfect obedience of its frail disciples.

FROM the evil spirit of dissention which these causes produce, unbelievers derive another flimsy argument to justify their conduct. But they should remember, that however christians may differ in other respects, they are unanimous on the grand, essential doctrines of the immortality of the soul, a resurrection to life, and salvation through the mediation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

SOME, indeed, may vary in their ideas of the nature and extent of this mediation ; but with all, as far as relates to practice, it appears to be virtually the same. We are agreed too, as to the duties required of

us, the general temper of mind that we ought to cultivate, and the corrupt passions that we ought to restrain. More perfect unanimity does not seem necessary, and therefore it is in vain to expect it.

IN recommending the essential truths of christianity, and endeavouring to extend its influence, we might forget that we are of any particular church, and consider every sincere disciple of Jesus as our friend and brother: for restrain men as you will, bind them with articles and creeds, compel them by the same penalties, and allure them by the same rewards, still they will differ in opinion. It is the prerogative of nature, of all who think; and were it possible to delineate our minds with accuracy, they would no more resemble each other than our faces. This infinite variety pervades the universe. It is the striking characteristic of the moral, as well as the natural world. And perhaps the different tints of intellectual beauty, the varying contrast of sentiment and thought,
the

the opposite directions of will and the endless combination of the passions might be as pleasing to the almighty Father, as the hills and valleys, the rivers and mountains with which he has adorned the earth, or the glorious diversity which he first created in the stars of heaven.

THE christian religion clearly admits of this variety, where its essential truths and duties are not concerned; and, indeed, it is as impossible that men should have precisely the same thoughts and opinions, as it is that the different scenes in nature should be exact counterparts of each other. Even in the history of the holy apostles we may discover a striking contrast between the characters of Peter and John, St. James and Paul. But though every man will claim the privilege of being, in many respects, an individual SELF, distinct from others, yet let us not convert this natural liberty and independence of the soul into a proud spirit of dissention, nor use it for a cloke of evil. Let us rest satisfied

with our own principles and persuasions without invading the rights of others; and, above all things, let us avoid that tyranny of opinion, which leads some to imagine that they only can discover truth, and that all men else are wandering in the dark. Still let us “hold fast the form of sound words,” and embrace every means which the goodness of divine providence hath afforded, of cleansing our iniquities and helping our infirmities. In particular, when we look forward to the prize of our high calling, and hope for a blessed immortality through Jesus Christ our Lord, let us be earnest and unwearied in fulfilling the measure of duty that is required, and, like the holy apostles, shew that we all are, on those occasions, “of one heart and one soul.”

BUT, to return—Another cause of infidelity springs from a sort of reflected vanity in supposing, that its professors are distinguished for genius and learning. This supposition can apply but to a very small number; and instead of being a rule, it is only

an exception to one. The greatest, the wisest and the best of men, since the propagation of christianity, have been christians. And it is remarkable that the very few professed infidels, who can claim any pretensions to GENIUS, have generally been marked by some striking features of character, independent of their religious tenets, that appear almost sufficient to account for their unbelief. They have been either dissolute in their principles, wicked, wanton and licentious in their manners, or despisers of all authority, and impatient of all restraint. Some have become infidels from a proud and selfish vanity that disdained the path where men in common walk; and others from a sort of passive calmness of soul, that wanted energy on every subject of importance, in which the passions are engaged, to rise above the mists of scepticism. Hence their doubts are not confined to religion. They can question the truth of such realities, as would make the untutored rustic smile with derision; though the same men, with the strangest inconsistency of charac-

ter, will propagate the wildest absurdities in philosophy, and subscribe with implicit faith to the most mysterious paradoxes in science. There is, indeed, no end to the follies and caprices of man ; but in contemplating the history of the human mind, we should be careful not to mistake the strange exceptions of a few eccentric beings for general practice ; nor reverence singularity as the infallible token of wisdom or of truth.

AMONG the many specious causes, or rather excuses, that are advanced also in favour of irreligion is the total indifference with which some men regard the duties of piety and the ordinances of christian worship. They profess not to feel any interest in the devout exercises of prayer, thanksgiving and praise. They acknowledge no want of repentance, and think not of their relation to the Supreme Being with any habitual sentiments of gratitude, of hope or fear. Some are ready to profess all this, and many sufficiently avow it by their violation of the sabbath, by their disregard of public worship

ship, and their total neglect of family prayer. Yet even these omissions of duty the pupil of infidelity will ascribe, perhaps, to greatness of mind and exemption from popular prejudices.

BUT let him appeal to experience; let him attend to the living examples that pass under his own observation, and then let him determine by whom this shameful indifference is chiefly acknowledged. He will find it principally among the vicious and the dissolute, the thoughtless and the idle. These are found in the greatest numbers at the extremities of human society; I mean among men of the highest and the very lowest orders. The former are often so wholly engrossed with the pomps and vanities of life; so pampered with luxury and pleasure, as almost to exclaim, when reminded of religion, "Who is the Lord?" And the latter, often bred up in ignorance and vice, often indifferent to improvement and careless of reputation, are prone to the very same vices as their superiors, only differently

modified; an insatiable passion for idleness and pleasure, an aversion or contempt for all discipline and restraint, and a proneness to licentious enjoyments. To confirm the truth of these remarks, attend to the example of those who move in what is called the fashionable world; or advert to the experience, which the government of your own families affords. Perhaps you might have seen with what perverse idleness your very servants endeavour to counteract your benevolent plans for their advantage and improvement. You might have observed with what weariness and ill-will they have devoted the small portion of time, which has been allotted them for their attendance on public worship, or with what low cunning they have frustrated your intentions, and lavished it away on some idle, and perhaps vicious indulgence. Yet these are the people, whose practice, in the eyes of the unbeliever, exhibits a proof of superiority and greatness of mind,

THEIR indifference, however, is real;
and their want of interest and sensibility,
when

when the duties of religion are enforced, is sufficiently apparent. To attempt therefore to honor God with their lips, when their hearts are far from him, would be a species of formal hypocrisy. And there are some, I will admit, who feel themselves in this predicament, that might not belong either to the highest or the lowest rank in the community ; who are not wholly engrossed with plans of ambition, business or pleasure, nor devoted to the indulgence of gross and sensual desires.

IT ill becomes us to be “ extreme to mark what is done amiss ;” the almighty Father only can judge of our will and power to do our duty : but let no man consider this shameful indifference in himself as a plea for innocence, or an excuse for irreligion. He who has forgotten his Maker, or no longer feels the divine impulse which teaches him to “ lift up his heart unto the Lord,” has stifled the voice of nature in his bosom ; he has quenched the vital spark that gives the soul an earnest of immortality, and a partial

tial anticipation of future bliss; he has blotted out that instinctive affection which is the high prerogative of man, which prompts the wandering savage to offer up his prayers to GOD, and bids him INVARIABLY connect the merits and the sufferings of the virtuous here, with the strong hope of happiness hereafter.

BUT, indeed, there is no principle of nature, however sacred and universal, that is not occasionally broken through, or extirpated from the human breast. The first inroads of vice are dangerous and sudden, and to the spread of corruption when once indulged there are no bounds. Do we not see wretches, who, by regular advances towards the last stages of depravity, have so far extinguished the instincts of nature as to abandon or destroy their own offspring? and others who, instead of honoring and protecting a father in the evil days of helpless infirmity, have by their vices, their cruelty and neglect, brought his grey hairs with sorrow to the grave? Do we not find
many

many who seem to have lost all sense of gratitude and honor? who are so estranged, also, from every principle of charity and pity, generosity and friendship, that their whole conduct appears to be governed only by motives of selfishness? The unbeliever, therefore, should not be too forward in ascribing his indifference, or want of religious sentiment, to constitutional infirmity; much less should he exalt it into any superiority of mind. He should rather consider it as a vice of long indulgence and of gradual growth; as a fatal lethargy of the soul, not arising from any incorrigible defect of nature, but insensibly produced by "the deceitfulness of sin." The felon may as well plead that he had lost his sense of justice, or that he was careless of reputation, in excuse for his crimes, as the infidel may urge this acquired indifference for the neglect of religion.

THUS I have endeavoured to explain some of the chief motives that lead men to the specious profession of Deism and the
vice

vice of infidelity. It requires no formal application of what has been said to shew the weakness and the folly, the mischief and corruption with which they are blended.

FROM the contemplation of these evils let us remain steadfast and immoveable in the faith, and “be ready always to give
“an answer to every man, that asketh us
“a reason of the hope that is in us, with
“meekness and fear.” It is easy for every scoffer to echo the doubts of others, and to start difficulties about the mysteries of religion; but it requires some powers of intellect, and some expansion of soul, to take a comprehensive view of divine Providence, and trace its operations in the history of the world. By such a general survey of important events, we learn rightly to estimate the human capacity, we feel our wants, and acknowledge our weakness.

BEFORE the day-spring from on high visited us, the cruelties, the frauds and superstitions that were practised in every
country,

country, under the form of religion, sufficiently evinced the necessity of a more perfect revelation. Accordingly, when the fulness of time was come, the Saviour of the world took up his abode with men, and extended the "knowledge of salvation to the ends of the earth." God was manifested in the flesh; in that form which was best calculated to impress the human mind with reverence, and to answer the grandeur and importance of the occasion. By sojourning with men, he became their living teacher, and exhibited a pattern for their imitation founded on precept and sanctioned by practice. His ever-sacred person also afforded the proper means of intercession with the almighty Father; and it was He who brought our relation to Him nearer, or at least rendered it more visible. He presented also to the eyes of the world an instance of glorified humanity, and taught us to what perfection we might hereafter attain by steadfast obedience and patient continuance in well-doing. Farther, by his wonderful incarnation and nativity, he taught

us

us what the power of God could effect ; and by his resurrection to life, and ascension into heaven, he dispelled the terrors of death, and became, as it were, the VISIBLE link which connects our present existence with the world of spirits and immortal life.

To subdue all prejudices, his divine ministry was confirmed by miracles ; and the finger of God was manifest in all that he said, did, or suffered. These external proofs of authenticity, derived from ocular demonstration, are necessarily removed from us ; but we have the undoubted testimony of those who heard, saw and believed, added to the growing experience of ages, which bears witness to the truth, benefits and blessings of the Messiah's kingdom ; we have seen it silently spread, flourish and prevail over principalities and powers, as the holy prophets foretold it would. The wisdom of divine love is still operating, and in process of time we shall discover a wider extension of its blessings. Already has it taught men to walk by faith, to live in hope, and prac-

tise charity ; already has it abolished many enormities in the melancholy history of human frailties and corruption. We have seen justice administered with greater impartiality, its severities tempered with mercy, and civilization becoming more perfect. In short, the whole system of human affairs, as far as christianity extends, is advancing in a state of gradual improvement, till in time we may hope that the glorious predictions of happiness under the Messiah's kingdom will be fulfilled ; " When mercy and truth shall meet together ; when righteousness and " peace shall kiss each other." That under this gracious dispensation of divine wisdom and mercy we might be content to live, and with a pure heart and humble mind learn to grow wise unto salvation, God of his infinite goodness grant, to whom, &c.

S E R M O N X I X .

THE DUTY OF PRAISING GOD.

P S A L M c l . 6 .

*Let every thing that hath breath, praise the
Lord.*

THE Psalmist inculcates, with peculiar force, the universal duty of praise to the great and beneficent Creator. In the 148th Psalm, beginning with the highest order of created beings, he descends to the elements of nature, exhorting them, in the sublimest strains of eastern poetry, to praise the Lord. Even the inanimate parts of the creation, though “ there is neither speech

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“ nor

“nor language among them,” may be said, in a figurative sense, to set forth the glory of God.

THE grandeur, the beauty and order of those objects which the Psalmist mentions, cannot fail to fill the human mind with rational admiration ; and when disposed to reflection, must lead us to the pious contemplation of that omnipotent Being who alone could form them. Such are “the sun and
“moon and all the stars of light ; mountains and hills, fruitful trees and valleys ;
“the earth which he hath formed and the
“deep waters thereof ; fire and hail, snow
“and vapor, stormy wind fulfilling his
“word.” Nor can we conceive a duty more suitable to the goodness, or more consistent with the dignity of those blessed spirits that are admitted into the regions of immortality, than that of singing hymns of gratitude and praise to the everlasting Father.

SINCE

SINCE the whole creation, therefore, seems to conspire in offering up this pleasing homage at the throne of grace, we cannot reflect, without a mixture of sorrow and surprise, that so many human beings should be wholly divested of those pious affections, and that devotional gratitude which discovers itself in acts of praise and thanksgiving to God. The omission of a duty so general and so important, so natural, and at the same time so pleasing to the mind, must proceed from selfish principles and an unfeeling heart; or from the most thoughtless, and sinful negligence.

WE are formed by nature for the love and admiration of what is grand and beneficent. The philosopher, and even the rustic, views through the telescopes of art the planets moving in their orbits with rational delight. We hasten with eager curiosity to gaze at the returning comet, and we contemplate the ocean in a storm with awful pleasure. The tall cedars that

F f 2

waved

waved on mount Libanus have beautified the pages of sacred song; rivers streaming through the valleys, and cataracts that fall from rock to rock never fail to charm us. The face of nature, indeed, discovers a thousand beauties, that waken kindred sympathies in the soul, and in hours of solitary meditation, may be said to "fill our hearts with food and gladness." But shall we in the works of the creation forget the great Creator? Shall we view, with wonder and delight, the rays of divine wisdom that penetrate all nature, and not direct our attention to the centre from which they all diverge? This would be not only unnatural, but ungrateful also. Not to mention in this place many more abundant causes for the performance of this duty, the infinite variety of objects that are furnished to delight the senses and improve the mind, and the capacities we have for relishing these pure intellectual pleasures, are alone sufficient claims on our gratitude and praise.

THE

THE first great advantage which we derive from the works of nature is, that they lead, or ought to lead us to the knowledge of God; and are at all times a sensible demonstration of his existence. Even though we had no relation or dependence on the Supreme Being (which indeed is a supposition that can scarcely be conceived) we could not, as rational creatures, withhold our praise and adoration of that infinite wisdom and power, from which proceeds such beauty, grandeur and perfection,

IF the imagination be delighted with what is truly great and sublime; if it be charmed with the perfection of wisdom, goodness and power; no object of contemplation can so compleatly fill it as that of the Almighty Father. Before we had boldness and access to Him, through our blessed Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, the idea of "The great and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity" might have overwhelmed the mind with terror, rather than inspired

it with confidence, or supported it with hope: But now, since "life and immortality are brought to light through the Gospel, and we have a High Priest who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities," meditations on the nature and the attributes of the Deity may be regarded, not only as our duty, but as a source of the purest felicity.

IF we consider the beneficence of God, as distinguishable in the works of the creation, we shall perceive more forcible motives for worship, thanksgiving and praise. He is indeed "the Giver of all good gifts." From the most exalted seraphim, down to the most inconsiderable productions of nature, all are called upon to look up to Him as to the first cause of existence, and the source, the centre and the soul of the infinitely varied, but appropriate blessings which they enjoy. Whatever bliss arises from the communion of saints in heaven, the pure delights and exalted pleasures that may spring from the reflection, that they

they have been thought worthy of a happy immortality, and the secret satisfactions which the soul must feel from a consciousness, that it is advancing towards the perfection of its nature, must all lead to the adoration of Him whose “love is perfect, “and whose mercy endureth for ever!”

WE cannot walk into the fields, trust ourselves on the waters, or retire to our chambers and commune with our own hearts, without being convinced that, “the “tender mercies of the Creator are over “all his works. He hath appointed the “moon for seasons, and the sun knoweth “his going down.” The earth, the sea and air swarm with living creatures, “wherein “are creeping things innumerable both “small and great beasts. The young lions “roar after their prey, and seek their meat “from God. All wait upon him, that “he may give them their meat in due “season. He openeth his hand and they “are filled with good: He hideth his face, “they are troubled; he taketh away their
F f 4. “breath,

“ breath, they die, and return to their
“ dust.”

BUT we need not look abroad into the works of nature for motives to praise the Lord: if we duly consider the many glorious distinctions of our present condition, the various powers with which we are endowed, and the many blessings which are peculiar to intelligent creatures, we shall have abundant cause to acknowledge the obligation and the fitness of this great duty. The grant of existence is the first, and most natural benefit that ought to excite our gratitude to the Supreme Being, which can express itself only by acts of praise, and which can be fulfilled only by obedience to his divine laws. To this free-gift and primary blessing of our heavenly Father, it is no small addition that he hath made us what we are—creatures of a superior order, distinguished by a thousand perfections from the mere animals, and presiding over a beautiful and extensive world.

BUT

BUT the most glorious of all human distinctions, and the most inestimable privilege that we can boast of, is the immortality of the soul; the capacity of improvement with which it is furnished, the opportunities which are offered here of “growing
“wise unto salvation,” and of being admitted, after we have journeyed “through
“this vale of darkness and shadow of
“death,” into his presence “with whom
“there is fulness of joy, and at whose right
“hand are pleasures for evermore.”

As a further inducement to praise the mercy and the goodness of God, let us examine our own hearts, and consider what fountains of joy and satisfaction spring up there, if they are not corrupted with vice, or “hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” Are you endowed with such a disposition that you can bear the wrongs and insults of the world with patient gentleness and christian forbearance? Make your acknowledgments to that divine Spirit, under whose gracious influence you have been
enabled

enabled to form it. If upon a retrospective view of life, you derive any satisfaction from the regular performance of christian duties, do not with unbecoming arrogance ascribe ALL to the sufficiency of human endeavours, but remember that it is He, who is, in short, the primary cause of all things, “that worketh in us both to will and to “do of his good pleasure.”

IN enumerating the various motives to praise and thanksgiving, also, we should by no means forget the pleasing comforts of relationship, the blessings of virtuous friendship, and the delightful satisfactions which result from gratitude and affection. To be in the continual habit of enjoying some of these good gifts from day to day and year to year, to have our senses impressed with beauty and grandeur by external objects, and our minds inspired with love and adoration from internal sentiments, without offering “the sacrifice of thanksgiving,” to that gracious POWER, who is the source of all that is great and good, argues not only
want

want of gratitude and a selfish turn of mind, but insensibility of heart.

CAN we ever expect that the man whose mind is never affected with the mercy of God, never led by pleasurable sensations to the duties of prayer and praise, will make a suitable return for any offices of kindness which a mere human being can confer upon him? Surely not. Self-love and interest may lead him to do something; vanity and a regard to the world may prevail on him, perhaps, to do more: but that genuine gratitude and pure benevolence, which spring up in the heart, that expansion of soul, which in a christian's bosom is as inseparable from acts of goodness as any cause in nature is from its effect, will be always wanting.

YET these remarks, I am sensible, will not bear any general application. Many are there in the world, who are alive to every sentiment of gratitude and affection in their intercourse with men; many are
there

there who would blush not to acknowledge any act of kindness from their brethren to the utmost of their power, and who are ever ready to pay the tribute of admiration and applause when any thing that is excellent and praise-worthy demands it—To objects such as these they bring a heart for ever fraught with sentiment. They are ready at all times to extol a benefactor, to reward the assiduities of friendship, or to admire the productions of genius and of wisdom. To God alone, to that Supreme Intelligence who is, in fact, our “all in all,” to use the apostle’s expression, they are indifferent. Strange infatuation! Can any benefactor have such claims to our gratitude and love as the Almighty? Can the world give us health and happiness, or any other blessing, if he withdraw his holy presence from us? Is there any wisdom, or goodness, any grandeur, or perfection, among men to excite our admiration, when contrasted with the attributes of the Deity, or the productions of nature?

BESIDES,

BESIDES, what folly and inconsistency is it to be anxious to gain only the good-will of those perishable creatures, who like ourselves are all journeying on to the place of their appointed rest, where the rich and the poor, the weak and the powerful meet together without any distinction, and to neglect the approbation of Him “in whose hands are the issues of life and death!”

BUT it may be necessary to state the duty of praising God more particularly. Not the most abandoned reprobate that ever lived, perhaps, is entirely devoid of that religious sentiment, which prompts him occasionally to worship, or at least to reverence the universal Father. When he views the sun rising in his splendor and dispersing the shades of night, when he beholds the moon and stars, and contemplates the whole system of nature under the various operations of her laws, he must feel an INVOLUNTARY impulse to worship and to praise Him who spake the word and they were created.

BUT

BUT such loose and momentary affections are of little avail. Unless they are formed by meditation into a regular course of duty, we can regard them only as other instinctive affections, and can claim no merit from them whatever. A degree of order and regularity is absolutely necessary to the exercise of every human virtue; but great care should be taken, particularly in religion, that this order be equally remote from indolent, unmeaning habit, and the unsteadiness of a thoughtless, giddy mind. It is with very great propriety, therefore, that one day in seven is appointed to be kept holy, and that in a public manner. Private devotion is a duty which every man owes to his Maker and himself: Public worship, beside these obligations, brings with it the good of society. Man is in every thing a social creature. He is social in his vices and his pleasures, he is social in his comforts and satisfactions; and should he not be social also in the performance of those sacred duties by which every one is equally bound? Independent of instruction
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and admonition, there are other causes to recommend public worship. The example of the apostles themselves ; the necessity of establishing a visible church on earth ; the acknowledged influence of example, and the universal power of sympathy on the human mind.

BUT of those who admit the necessity and importance of public worship, how very few are constant and regular in their attendance on it. While the business of the world is followed with the most punctual exactness, the duties of the sabbath are sometimes neglected under the most frivolous pretences, and often from mere indolence. It is scarcely possible to believe that any human being, when he considers the conditions of this present life, that he is to sojourn here only for a few years at most, that this is to be the probationary scene of his existence, a scene which is to determine the fate of eternity, should be thus regardless of duties that are so intimately connected with the " ONE THING NEED-
" FUL,"

“FUL,” and take such little care to secure the favor of the Deity.

THERE is no age, or situation of life, in which we are not called upon by nature, by reason and religion, to worship and to glorify the Almighty Father. In youth we praise him for the health and vigor peculiar to that early period of our existence; and for the many new delights of pleasing gratifications which it brings with it. In manhood we bless him for liberty and independence, for the comforts, perhaps, of paternal affection, and for the successful prosecution of some honest calling. In old age we have abundant cause to praise Him for the benefits of experience, for the many opportunities that have been afforded us of growing wise unto salvation; and, when we have finished our course and fought the good fight of christian faith, for the near prospect of a blessed immortality. In prosperity we are called upon by every principle of gratitude, as well as devotion, to offer up our thanksgiving to Him as the
Giver

Giver of all good gifts : in adversity, to whom can we look for comfort and relief, but to “ the God of all comfort,” who is able to bring good out of what appears to be evil ; who if he has sent us afflictions hath also given us grace and strength in order to support them, and who hath “ opened the kingdom of heaven to all “ believers !”

BUT in fulfilling this our duty of praise to the Supreme Being, we must not indulge the vain idea that we at all contribute to his aggrandizement, or to the perfection of his bliss. No, the chief advantage derived from acts of praise is the influence which they have on the affections of the mind. Gratitude for benefits received, and love on the contemplation of goodness, are passions deeply implanted in the human heart : And the calling of them forth, on proper occasions, has the most pleasing and beneficial effects on the temper and disposition of man. On no occasion can we feel them in such an exalted degree, as when we con-

template the Divine Attributes, and in the hour of devotion, "lift up our hearts unto the Lord." From having an object ever before us to whom we may address our prayers for mercy in time of trouble, and our songs of praise for blessings enjoyed, we shall have an inexhaustible source of comfort within our own bosoms, and learn to extend a proper share of the same devout affections to our fellow-creatures. We shall be duly sensible of the consolations of friendship and the communications of knowledge. From a daily and hourly conviction, that we experience the tender mercies of God, we shall be taught to imitate them, in a very imperfect degree, indeed, within the little sphere of our own authority.

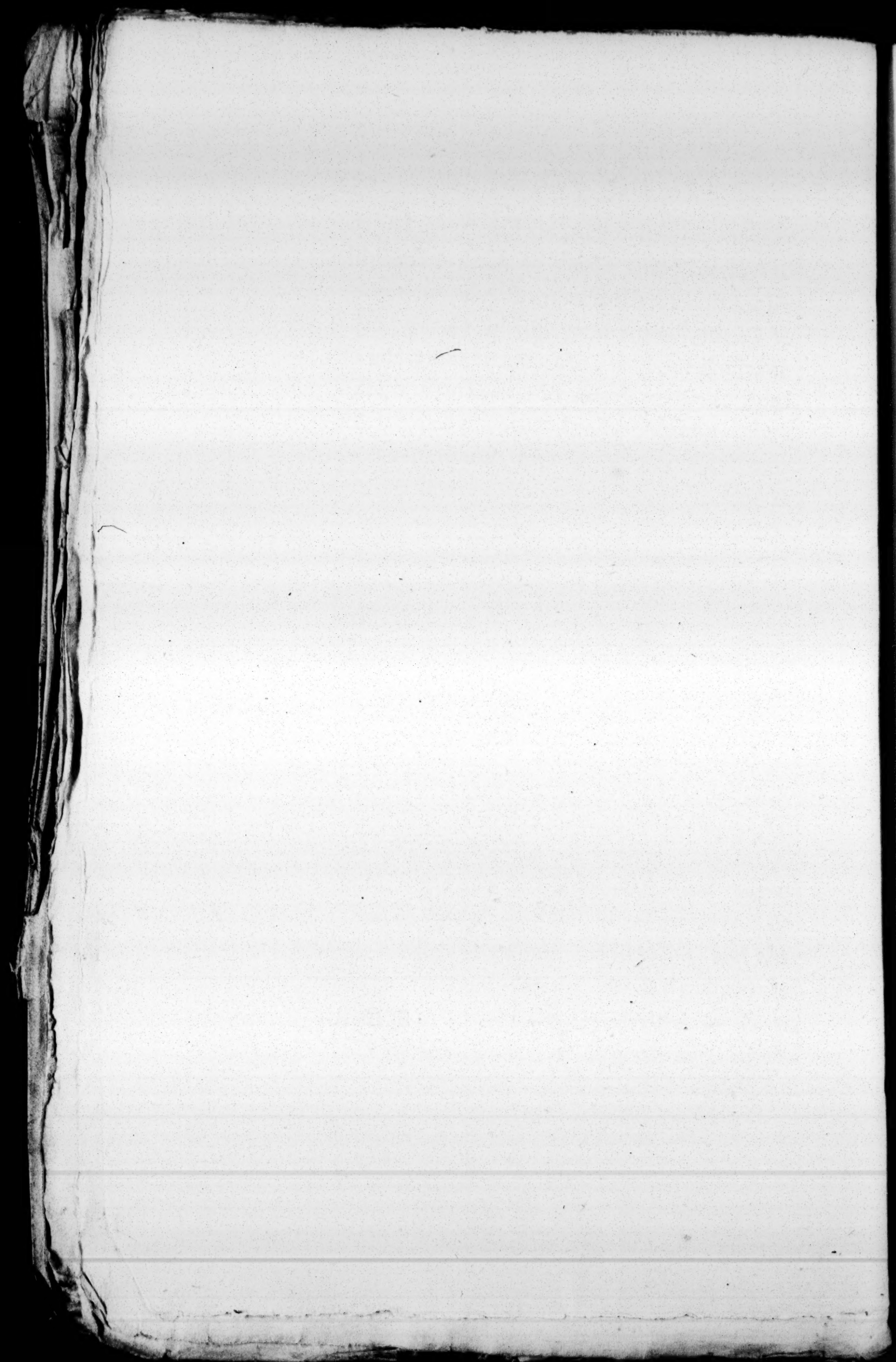
SUCH then are the benefits that would result from the regular and due performance of these religious duties. But we cannot be too careful to distinguish between the mere formalist, who enters the sanctuary without one pious sentiment in his heart,

heart, perhaps, and the zealous, though rational christian, who joins with interest and fervor in every petition for mercy, and every expression of praise and adoration. He will come to the temple of God for such comfort and consolation, such satisfaction and delight, as he can derive from no other intercourse. He feels his soul enlarged, his sentiments ennobled, his unruly passions checked, and his more benevolent affections heightened and improved. Though he studies from a well-spent life to deserve the divine favor, and hopes that his prayers and his alms will go up for a memorial before God, yet his devotion is never without a mixture of contrition for past offences. He may feel his sorrows assuaged, the troubles of the world may vanish before the awful contemplation of eternity and its concerns; but still he will not forget, even while he enjoys what might be called the testimony of a good conscience, to smite upon his bosom, like

the penitential publican, and cry, " God
" be merciful to me a sinner."

LET me farther observe, by way of conclusion, in recommending the universal duty of praising God, that we should not by any means imagine this religious obligation is fulfilled by uttering only a form of words, however excellent in themselves, on stated occasions. These are only the instruments, the proper helps that have been wisely furnished for this purpose: we must bring a heart to the divine work filled with the love of God and the love of man. If we attempt to open our mouths in prayer, or praise to God, at a time when our souls are the willing slaves of sin, when we are preyed on by guilty, or malignant passions, it is blasphemy, and not devotion, that we offer at the throne of grace. God may be said to be praised by the virtuous and the pious man every hour of his life, and that most effectually—not indeed by continual petitions immediately addressed to HIM, but by the example of a godly life, by the diligent

diligent improvement of his time, by the unwearied pains which he takes to form his disposition to the meekness and gentleness of Christ, by his integrity, his charity, candour and moderation ; and, in short, by all those christian graces of character and conduct, which will always flow from the true worship of God and the sincere love of man.



S E R M O N X X .

ON THE CHARACTER AND CONDUCT
OF PILATE.

JOHN xix. 5.

*Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown
of thorns and the purple robe. And Pilate
saith unto them, Behold the man !*

THE crucifixion of our blessed Lord
was preceded by a variety of events,
which must have aggravated the terrors of
that awful moment, when he lifted up
his eyes unto heaven, and said, " Father,
" the hour is come."

ALMOST every crime that proceeds from human baseness, and every error that arises from human frailty, was experienced by "the Lord of life," at the time when he was about to finish "his labour of love," and to suffer for the sins of men. The treachery of Judas was followed by the shameful desertion of his disciples, and the falsehood and infidelity of Peter. To the violence and brutality of the mob, succeeded the insults and mockery, the lawless outrage and unmanly cruelty of Pilate's soldiers. And to complete this barbarous triumph of jealous zeal and sullen malice over mercy, truth and justice, was added the mean, unworthy conduct of the judge himself.

IN commemorating this awful scene of suffering and of death, you have doubtless heard the wonderful predictions of the prophets, and the very singular, but striking institutions of the Jews compared with the gospel history of our Lord's crucifixion. You have been told, also, of his great humility in thus condescending to die for our
sins,

sins, and have been reminded, at every celebration of the communion, as well as at this solemn season *, of the many benefits of his passion. In addition to this, it may be observed, that the excellent services which our church hath wisely appointed for the holy week, contain almost all the information of scripture on this interesting subject.

IN discoursing on the words of the text, therefore, to give some variety to our devotions, I shall confine myself chiefly to the consideration of Pilate's character and conduct on this occasion, and endeavour to point out the motives that determined his unjust sentence against Him, " in whom
" there was no guile, neither was deceit
" found in his mouth." Serious contemplation on this subject, may lay open to us the corrupt biases that hung upon his mind, and teach us the high importance of those principles which he neglected to cultivate.

* Preached on Good-Friday.

PILATE

PILATE seems not to have been naturally cruel, nor enormously wicked. If we may judge from the faint traces of his character which antiquity furnishes us with, he appears to have had some share of clemency, moderation and justice. When Joseph of Arimathea came to beg the body of his crucified Redeemer, he granted his request; and though solicited by the rulers and the priests to alter the superscription on the cross, he would not. On some occasions, at least, he was not wholly devoid of principle or kindness; and his conduct towards the Jews, as mentioned by Josephus, when they assembled and supplicated him to remove the military standards of the empire from the holy city, does him some degree of honor. There was no portion of the savage fierceness and capricious rage of his master Tiberius in his bosom; nor do we find him branded with any of those acts of wanton barbarity that were so common in the age in which he lived. But his behaviour towards the holy Jesus, though combined with something like clemency, betray-

betrayed, at least, a weak and pusillanimous mind. He had neither the courage nor the magnanimity to take a decided part in favor of an innocent culprit ; nor was he so lost to every sense of shame and every sentiment of humanity, as to assume the sceptre of blood, and consign one " in whom he " could find no fault," to the most cruel death, without scruple and without apology.

PILATE, indeed, was not the bold aspiring tyrant that affected to despise the control of virtue and of justice ; but he possessed a baseness and corruption which in his capacity, as governor of a province, perhaps, proved equally oppressive.

INSTANCES frequently occur in courts of criminal judicature, in which a corrupt and arbitrary judge may lean to the side of power, and favor the clamor of the persecuting multitude, without any great impeachment of his justice or humanity. But in the present case, when we consider it as
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coming before a magistrate of the Roman empire, there was scarcely the shadow of a plea for condemnation, or severity: for if we examine the charges which the malicious Jews brought against our Lord, nothing can appear more frivolous and absurd. One was, that "he stirred up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry."—God of mercies! did they not need teaching and stirring up? Was there a spot on the whole globe that had been so often the scene of civil slaughter, treachery and murder! Were not those stubborn and obdurate people grown infamous and detestable even to a proverb, in the eyes of surrounding nations, for almost every transgression that can be found in the black catalogue of human crimes! If we read the page of sacred history, attend to the lamentations of their prophets, or credit the report of their own impartial historian, we shall not find in the annals of the world a nation that needed so much the divine instructions and heavenly example of a Saviour. At no period of time, and in no kingdom of the earth, could the meekness, the charity and
humility

humility of the Messiah be more necessary, or more useful, than in correcting the vices, subduing the prejudices and softening the savage manners of the Jews. Another of their accusations was that of “forbidding to give tribute unto Cæsar.” This was equally frivolous, and FALSE moreover. That a poor individual, without power and without influence, one who went about from village to village and house to house, preaching righteousness, should be able to injure the revenue of the empire, or to kindle a mutiny among people who despised him, and in a province thronged with legionary soldiers, was a charge so groundless and absurd, that it must have raised contempt even in the mind of Pilate, or of Herod; and might justly have led the former to believe, that they had delivered him into his hands through malice and envy.

IN order to strengthen their evidence, they perverted a metaphorical expression, which he casually uttered on the resurrection of his body, and wished with a ludicrous,

crous, but industrious malice, to construe it into a profanation of their temple.

THE crime of blasphemy, which they urged against him with such clamorous violence, and which they grounded on his declaration of his real character, however heinous in the estimation of the Jews, seems not to have had any weight with Pilate ; since it was omitted in the superscription on the cross, which exhibited, according to the custom of the Romans, the supposed offence for which he suffered. The last charge they brought against him was, that he said he was " Christ, a king." But the king of what ? His kingdom he repeatedly told them was not of this world ; the ensigns of his power were grace and truth, justice and mercy. The sceptre with which he controuled the actions of men was not the sceptre of violence, but was in the simple, though persuasive language of prophecy, " a right sceptre ;" and could the greatest perversion of jealousy and hatred persuade them, for a moment, that he who had not where to lay his head, would attempt to rival

rival the greatness of the Cæsars? Could they imagine that the meek and gentle Saviour wanted to raise the standard of rebellion against the conquering eagle, and to make his way through blood unto a throne! Not the most jealous guardians of Roman power, nor even the petty tyrants that ruled the province, could entertain the most distant idea of it. All who flocked to hear the gracious words that proceeded from his mouth knew, that he came on earth to establish peace and righteousness among men. He was to perform the will of his heavenly Father in bringing sinners to repentance, and teaching them to worship him in the beauty of holiness: he was to finish the work which had been given him, and when he had drunk the bitter cup that was allotted him to drink, he was to suffer and to die.

THESE frivolous accusations the Roman governor saw in their true light, and knew the motives on which the whole prosecution was grounded. He had said again and again
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that he found no fault in him ; and yet he was base and worthless enough to expose him to the insults of the mob, and the wanton cruelty of the common soldiers.

STILL, however, the fatal sentence was deferred. After he had suffered him to be buffeted and spit on, to be derided under the mock form of royalty, to be scourged, and crowned with thorns ; he seems to have felt some compunctions of nature in his behalf, and yielded, for a moment, to the generous emotions of compassion. He saw, perhaps, with what patient gentleness he bowed under the iron hand of power, and with what meek affliction he received the lashes of the scourge. He might have thought that the same spectacle of sorrow, which roused the sentiments of humanity in his bosom, would have made the cruel Jews relent ; and was determined to produce him once more before them. “ Then came Jesus forth,” says the disciple whom he chiefly loved, “ bearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe.” And Pi-
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late faith unto them, “ Behold the man !” Behold him like a lamb brought to the slaughter and “ as a sheep before his shearer “ dumb, and opening not his mouth.” Doubtless he thought when they beheld his silent anguish, and considered the sufferings which he had already undergone ; when they saw the blood trickle from his brows, and as it fell, perhaps, mingle with his tears ; they might at last feel the sensations of pity, and listen to the intercessions of mercy : But these cruel men seem to have sacrificed every principle of humanity to their gloomy superstitions, their sullen bigotry, their malice and revenge. Delay provoked them, and remonstrance served only to make them more outrageous. They proceeded to tumult and disorder, and with insidious malice asserted that, if Pilate persisted in sparing the life of his prisoner, he was not Cæsar’s friend. The voice of pity was now stifled, and the contest that had for some time been feebly maintained against a torrent of overwhelming rage and vindictive malice, was now over ; “ for imme-

“diately as he heard that saying,” Jesus was delivered to be crucified.

BUT whence proceeded this baseness and depravity, this irresolute cruelty and mean compliance on the part of Pilate? We may, I think, ascribe it chiefly to two causes. Want of that steady fortitude and determined principle which seems necessary to the support, if not the existence of almost every virtue, and a mind that was evidently “in bondage to the world.” A bondage that is incompatible with every thing that is independent, great or good; and from which nothing but what is mean and worthless can proceed. He rather chose to be the idol of a rabble for the present hour, than to be revered for ever as the arbiter of mercy, truth and justice. He forgot the duty which he owed his neighbour and himself. He wished to please the PEOPLE; and like every one else, who pursues the gale of popular applause through the crooked paths of dishonor and corruption, he first became detestable in the eyes of others,
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and at length contemptible in his own. He had but little ambition to shew himself the protector of injured innocence, or the friend of persecuted truth. Every thing gave way, principle and passion, conviction and duty—dignity of character and office, integrity and honor, were all sacrificed to the lowest of all worldly motives, and the base submission of a dastardly spirit!—He was zealous only to shew that he was the friend of Cæsar—the friend of an inhuman tyrant and destroyer; and when a better opportunity was wanting, he could submit to the shameful degradation of becoming the vile instrument of cruelty and oppression in the hands of lawless violence and unprovoked barbarity.

THE melancholy sequel of Pilate's history, was such as naturally proceeded from his principles and conduct. He was turned out of his government by the remonstrances and complaints of those very people whom he had sometimes studied with servile fear to please, and sometimes tried

with weak and irresolute tyranny to outrage and oppress. He was disgraced in the opinion of his master ; while every thing conspired to aggravate the misery of self-reproach, and to give the keenest edge to misfortune and adversity. Weary of life, therefore, he sought a refuge from despair, like the guilty Judas, in the horrors of self-destruction *. It is somewhat singular, but truly characteristic, that the BETRAYER and DESTROYER of our blessed Lord should thus perish in the same manner.

FROM an example so striking, we may learn the importance of that fortitude and independence, without which there can be no soundness of principle, and see the necessity of keeping ourselves, as much as possible, " unspotted from the world." It is in vain that virtuous principles are admitted, if we have not resolution to put them in practice, and it is to little purpose that nature has given us good dispositions,

* Lardner, Vol. I. p. 377, last edit.

if we suffer them to be perverted; or if we neglect to cultivate and improve them.

HAPPINESS is not conferred on the knowledge of duty, but on the performance of it. Many obstacles will lie in our way, and many flattering snares will tempt us to wander from our path. If we wish to acquit ourselves like men, therefore, we must follow the apostle's precept, "stand fast, be firm, for we live in continual warfare." —The best of human beings will find sufficient temptations to enthrall their virtue, unless they watch and pray; and if during our sojourning here, we suffer ourselves to be heedless of our course, there is little reason to hope we shall avoid "the broad road that leadeth to destruction."

To fluctuate, like Pilate, between good and evil, is, perhaps, no less dangerous; it is impossible to serve two masters. Where the heart is divided, there can be no comfort and no fidelity. Wretchedness will soon follow where disorder enters, and an

attempt to reconcile the indulgence of depraved passions and corrupt principles with moral, or religious duty, may increase our misery, but will not alleviate our guilt. The mixed character therefore, we may observe, is always the most wretched, because it is the most vulnerable.

THERE are some, indeed, whose “consciences are hardened through the deceitfulness of sin;” who are grown callous to the sentiments and duties of humanity, and who seldom feel remorse for crimes. These are beyond the reach of moral and religious discipline; and if they can be satisfied with sowing the harvest of iniquity in this world, they must expect to reap the fruits of it in that which is to come. But by far the greater part of mankind, I will hope, are not without good dispositions, though blended, perhaps, with some corruptions, and always allied to kindred frailties.

MANY

MANY are there, who find themselves on any trying emergency harrassed by the conflict of opposing principles, and entangled with contrary obligations: they hang in suspense between the interests of this world, its pomps and pleasures, its wealth and power, and their duty towards God. The misfortune of Pilate was that of being blindly attached to the person of the emperor; and instead of following the dictates of conscience, yielding to the corrupt influence of selfish and depraved passions.

IN order to guard against the errors which his character exhibits, we should consider, that no worldly compensation whatever can make atonement for the loss of our integrity and honor, even in the eyes of men; and before that Almighty Being who will soon call us into another state of existence, and pass on us the judgments of eternity, the pomp of riches and the vanities of power, will vanish away like a morning cloud, and be to us of no more consequence than the toys which amused our infancy.

A FULL persuasion of this grand, fundamental truth in morals and religion, together with a firm belief that "whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap," ought to inspire us with the most unbounded fortitude in the discharge of our duty towards God, our neighbour and ourselves. Independent of the exalted satisfactions that spring up in our bosoms from the contemplation of a course of just and benevolent actions, we shall find, also, that the wisdom of the world cannot teach us sounder policy, even if all our hopes and expectations terminated here. The ways of the wicked are perplexed and intricate. Those that enter them, know not in what labyrinths they may be bewildered, nor in what fatal snares they may be entangled; but "he that walketh uprightly, walketh surely."

To attain the dignity and independence of christian virtue, therefore, let us carefully examine into the imperfections of our hearts, and learn to what evils we are
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most exposed : by vigilance and prayer to our heavenly Father that he would “ not “ lead us into temptation, but at all times “ deliver us from evil,” we shall then be able to guard against the encroachments of every inordinate desire, and make such pious resolutions as may enable us not only to form habits of piety and virtue, but to continue in them. Instead of being misled by the meteors of folly, or “ the deceitfulness of “ sin,” we might then be able to resist evil, and to repel with manly fortitude the invaders of our peace from whatever quarter they assault us.

IT is by this wholesome discipline and steady perseverance, that the christian temper and conduct are formed. In vain may we hope for safety, when we enter the field of danger, surrounded by a host of foes, if we have not previously concerted some measures of escape, or taken some effectual weapons of defence. To be too careless or too confident ; to rush on the borders of destruction, when no fatal necessity impels
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us, and to slumber in forgetfulness till the enemy surprise us, is not "to fight the good fight of faith." The christian warfare requires us to put on the whole armour of God, and to be from "within" and from without to all temptations "armed."

IN our intercourse with the world, we are not however to shrink from the scene of trial, and avoid the society of men with the sullen disposition of hermits, or the gloomy superstitions of monastic life; but before we associate much with our fellow-creatures, it behoves us to consider on what grounds our social intercourse rests. It may not be improper for us to enquire, when we "commune with our own hearts," Do we fly to society for the more perfect enjoyment of idle and voluptuous pleasures, or do we seek to gratify vanity and pride? Do we hunt after men, with whom we may associate in vice and wickedness, or are we flattering the powerful and great with mean assiduities; with the sacrifice of every
virtuous

virtuous and independent principle, that we might grasp at the paltry distinctions of wealth and honors? If any of these motives, or all of them occasionally, promote our intercourse with the world, and if our social gratifications rest on no better foundation, we need not wonder to find some parts of our lives stained with the vice and corruption, the meanness and pusillanimity which disgraced the governor of Judea. But if our object, in seeking society, be to do good, or to share in the rational comforts of virtuous friendship; if in hours of relaxation, we pursue only rational pleasures, and in the graver intervals of conversation, we strive to communicate, or hope to receive some benefit and blessing; something that might enlarge the mind, sooth our afflictions, if we have any, and strengthen our principles; then our intercourse with the world might be productive of every thing that is pious and just, charitable and good. This would be so using the bounties of providence as not abusing them; and
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the world on such terms, instead of being that encumbered soil of thorns and briars which choke the seed of every virtue as it springs, would prove the good ground which brings forth fruit an hundred fold.

As it is the duty of every christian to embrace the precept of his blessed Lord, and watch and pray, lest he enter into temptation, such self-examination as I have been recommending might at all times prove salutary, and in some cases effectual. But in guarding against the snares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches, let us be careful how we enlist, like Pilate, under the banners of the great. To visit the fatherless and widow in their affliction, to relieve the poor, and administer to the wants of the sick, are social duties from which we expect a blessing, but from an alliance with wealth and power we often find a curse. At a distance, we too often view the gay distinctions of this world with

eager admiration, and on a nearer approach we bow to them like slaves. Amidst the dazzling splendor of earthly greatness, the interests of eternity are lost, or at least neglected, as we see is almost universally the case, and the wretched vassals that throng around the habitations of power, make no scruple to sacrifice dignity and independence, conscience and honor, to the mere breath of favor, perhaps, or for the prospect of some trifling bauble that glitters before their eyes.

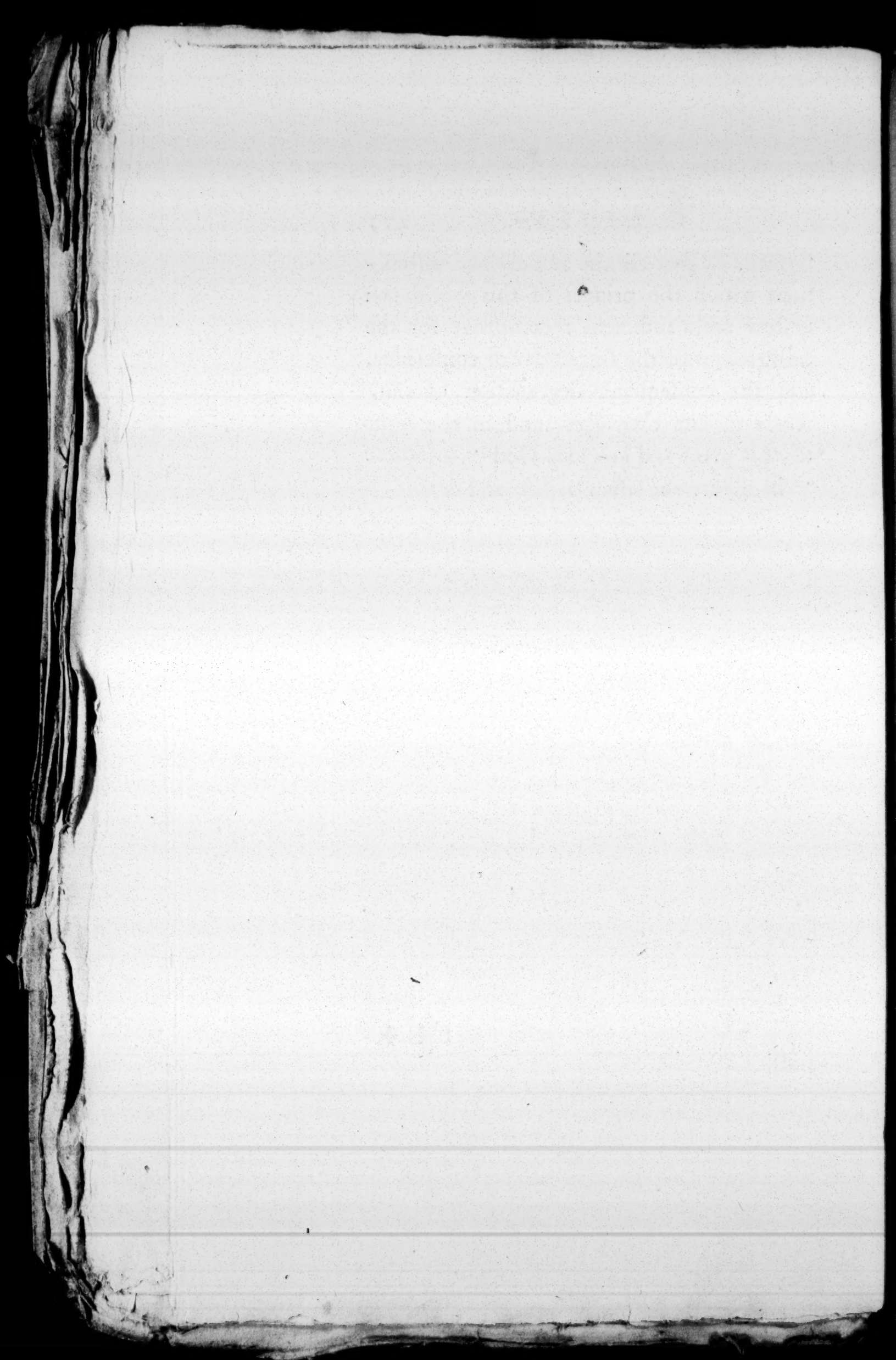
THE crafty Jews had well studied, and well understood the character of their abject governor; and in order to accomplish their malice, hinted at the displeasure of the emperor. This was the readiest spur to a worldly-minded wretch, and immediately as "he heard that saying," records the holy evangelist, the blessed Jesus was led away to be crucified. He regarded not the rebuke of conscience, nor dreaded the crime of shedding innocent blood; all he feared

feared was, lest he might possibly offend Cæsar.

How many are there in the world who, like the wretched Pilate, look up to some one or more of their fellow-creatures, as to a God that absolutely governs or controuls their actions. How many are there like this pitiful governor, in such wretched bondage to the world, that they dare not think, speak or determine but as their Cæsar shall direct!

Let us study to avoid these degrading connections and base dependencies, not so much from any principle of worldly pride, or overweening notions of liberty, as from a deep conviction of the guilt and corruption that are inseparable from them. Let us ever be ready to give honor to whom honor is due, and in meekness and simplicity of heart shew ourselves worthy followers of Christ; but let us remember, that “the Lord He is
“ God and Him only we should wor-
ship

“ ship.” Not all the honors and distinctions which the princes of this world can bestow are a sufficient recompence for the prostitution of the sacred law of conscience, and the consequent degradation of ourselves in our own eyes, and in the sight of that great and gracious God “ in whose
“ hands are the issues of life and death.”



S E R M O N X X I .

O N S O B R I E T Y .

I P E T E R i . 13 .

— *Be ſober.*

WHEN we conſider the inſtability of human conduct, and the tendency which almoſt every propenſity of the mind has to diſorder and exceſs ; when we reflect on the dangerous influence of paſſion, and contemplate the variety of characters that have been ſeduced to vice and folly from the unlimited indulgence of ſuch diſpoſitions, as might have been productive of virtue, if they had been properly cultivated ;

we shall regard the precept of the text as conveying instruction at all times seasonable, and important.

SOBRIETY of conduct, indeed, with regard to the things of this world, should form one of the grand characteristic distinctions of the disciple of Christ. He whose whole soul is enslaved to ambition, or engaged in the sordid pursuits of gain, must be a stranger to many of those mild virtues and perfections of character, which the holy gospel teaches us to cultivate. Peace and contentment, patience and humility, dwell not with the mere worldling, or the man of intemperate desires ; but with him who has learnt to set boundaries to his enjoyments, and who considers himself, in every situation of life, as the child of discipline, acting under the providence of a wise and gracious God. Experience and reflection, as well as the words of divine truth, will teach him, that moderation and Sobriety are as necessary to his happiness, as they are essential to his duty. Within the bounds of
inno-

innocence lie all the comforts that are worth enjoying. Transgress the sacred limits which the Almighty hath appointed, and you may, indeed, share the loose pleasures of dissipation ; you may catch at the turbulent joys of ambition, and the idle distinctions of wealth ; but such gratifications form no part of a christian's happiness : nor can they equal the calm delight of him, who eats his meal " with gladness and singleness of heart," and covets that gain only, which results from the union of " Godliness with Contentment."

IN discoursing, therefore, on the words of the text, let me exhort you to " be sober," in your pleasures ; in your worldly pursuits ; and more particularly in the indulgence of your passions.

IN recommending to you the sober enjoyment of pleasure, I shall not collect the many peremptory precepts which are to be found in the sacred volume ; since no one, who has the least knowledge of his re-

ligious duty, can doubt, but that the law of God is on this head sufficiently clear and explicit. Let us rather dwell, therefore, on the moral considerations that render moderation in our enjoyments an indispensable duty; and endeavour to convince “the lovers of pleasure,” that Sobriety is absolutely necessary to render the gratification of their favorite passion productive of happiness.

NOT only to pleasure, but even to the pursuits of virtue and the indulgence of every desire, reason and religion have affixed proper boundaries. If we transgress these, we not only depart from the paths of duty, but in reality change the object of pursuit, and defeat our own intentions. Frugality when carried too far degenerates into meanness; excess of courage becomes temerity; and generosity is no longer a virtue than while it is regulated by some regard to justice. The same moderation is necessary to the gratifications of sense. All derive their value from that Sobriety of enjoyment which religion prescribes. We listen with delight to the wild melody, with which
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the birds seem to welcome the return of spring; and we view the awful and the pleasing scenes of nature with secret joy; the falling cataract, the winding brook, the cultivated valley, the lofty mountain, and the extended sea, all have their charms when viewed occasionally; but were these objects continually before us, they would charm no more.

IT is the same with him who is carried round in the ceaseless circle of fashionable pleasures; or who is always in pursuit of some sensual gratification. He joins, indeed, the splendid throng, and sits down at the luxurious banquets of dissipation; but it is to him a sort of "active idleness," rather than enjoyment: he knows not that lively relish of delight, which at first springs from novelty, and which nothing but a grateful vicissitude can preserve; nor does he experience any of those satisfactions which tell him, in the hour of gratification, that he is "using the bounties of his Creator without abusing them."

HAPPY would it be for the world, if these were the only effects which proceeded from intemperate pleasures: but we too often find, that in scenes of sensuality and voluptuousness vices abound, and evils of the most alarming nature originate.

IT is in those hours when reflection is banished from the mind, that the contagion of bad example taints our principles, and that habits of vice are secretly formed. Whenever that vigilance, which is at all times necessary to keep our feet from falling, is overcome by excess of enjoyment, sin and disorder are ready to assail us. Remember, it was in the unguarded moment of impure pleasure, that David was first tempted to commit a crime, which he afterwards bewailed with tears of contrition, and all “the bitterness of grief.” Amidst the intemperate joys of the banquet, Herod, also, was induced to make that rash and wanton oath, which led to the murder of the venerable Baptist. Could we read the history of those who find themselves wretched

ed without the consolations of innocence ; and who, if they are pitied for their calamities, can never be respected for their virtues, we should often find them tracing back the origin of their misery to the immoderate indulgence of some favorite pleasure.

BUT let it be granted that your enjoyments are at present attended with none of these serious evils ; yet there are many causes which should make you strictly observe that Sobriety which the apostle recommends. The active duties of life are of a RELATIVE nature ; and we are bound to promote the welfare of OTHERS as well as our own. We will admit, therefore, for argument's sake, that your gratifications and amusements, though frequent, are, as far as they immediately relate to yourselves, harmless, at least, if not improving. But while you are in pursuit of them, consider whether you are not neglecting some important duties. Not to dwell on the waste of fortune and of time, probably you have some around

you, that have a right to look up to you for instruction, comfort and support. It rests with you, in a great measure, to form their principles, to guard them against temptation, and establish them in the paths of duty. But how can you do this, if you are ready at all times to hear the summons of pleasure, and fly to the scenes of fashionable amusement? Your casual exhortations to diligence, sobriety and carefulness will be counteracted by your own example, and heard with indifference, or perhaps with scorn. But farther, every one knows that where there is dissipation abroad, there is sure to be irregularity and confusion at home. Not to mention the disorder which it will introduce into your affairs, and the disadvantage which it must be to your profession, if you have any, you will find that you have been instrumental in giving habits of idleness and vice, of meanness and vulgarity to your children; and thrown temptations to dishonesty and neglect in the way of your domestics; whose usefulness, whose comfort and support all chiefly depend

depend on their integrity, sobriety and care.

BESIDES, when we consider the short period of human life, how much of it passes away in the helpless state of infancy, and how much is often lost under the infirmities of age; how much is occupied in sleep and the refreshment of the body, how much we are deprived of by the unavoidable languor of disease, and how much is spent in the necessary avocations of life; we might wonder to see any one lavishing away a great part of the small portion that remains, in a constant succession of light and frivolous amusements; in gratifications that are sometimes sensual and wicked, and always mean, profligate, or degrading. Amidst such a scene of inexhaustible beauty, grandeur and perfection as the all-gracious Creator has placed before us, I pity the man who cannot find pleasures, since pleasures he must have, that are not only harmless, but rational and improving. Various are the duties of active life that
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might be made a source of the purest pleasure ; various are our capacities of intellectual enjoyment ; frequent are the opportunities of doing good to some of our fellow-creatures, and frequent are the occasions that require the exercise of the most serious meditation, and that should lead us to the practice of devotional duties. Under such circumstances, we might wonder that a human being should find any hours hang heavy on him, excepting those of sickness and of sorrow.

To employ one part of the day in expedients to know how to waste the other ; to be indifferent to the pursuits of knowledge ; to be at a loss how to spend our time properly, when so many opportunities occur of comforting the afflicted, correcting the ignorant, and relieving the poor ; is a mark of the most lamentable weakness and folly. —Of this weakness and folly, however, in a greater or less degree, we must all perhaps plead guilty : and to such omissions as spring from the natural infirmities of man, the
gracious

gracious revelation of Christ is merciful and kind. We are not forbidden to indulge occasionally in such amusements as might contribute to health and serve to unbend the mind. We are not wholly debarred from these, even when no other good can be derived from them. We are only required to "be sober;" and the necessity of being so will be evident to all, when we consider, that, beside the neglect of other duties, with excess of pleasure almost every evil that can befall us is connected; habits of idleness and vice; shame and sorrow; poverty and disease; and frequently ruin, misery and guilt.

LET me now exhort you to "be sober" in your worldly pursuits. With the generality of men, perhaps, the chief temptations and the most arduous trials of the present life, arise from too great a desire for the riches, power and honors of this world. It was by the offer of these, you may remember, that the evil spirit of darkness vainly hoped to tempt the Saviour of mankind. He

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knew their extensive influence on the human heart, and it is in allusion to the power which he derives from such temptations, perhaps, that the evangelist calls him "the Prince of this world," and St. Paul "the God of this world." Many, indeed, are so perfectly enthralled with its concerns, that they have neither time nor inclination to think of any other God : and often so strong is this delusion of sin, that it will confound the distinctions of virtue and vice. There are some, who can deceive themselves so far, as to mistake the most sordid avarice for prudent care or commendable thrift ; and think, that a course of life marked with frequent instances of oppression to the poor and needy, with many acts of circumventing fraud to the worthy and unsuspecting, and many unfair advantages taken of the ignorant and weak ; deserves the appellations of active industry and superior talents. But into whatever heart this worldly-mindedness enters, it never fails to produce its harvest of iniquity. The holy apostle to express the strong conviction which he had
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of this truth, asserts, with peculiar force of expression, that "covetousness is idolatry;" and that "the love of money is the root of all evil." Nor did he want examples in the history of his own nation to confirm the truth of his sentiments. Among others, doubtless, he remembered the wretched Gehazi; the dreadful scene of perjury and murder, that followed the covetousness of Ahab; and the horrid treachery of Judas, who grasped at "the wages of iniquity," and betrayed his heavenly Master.

WANT of moderation and Sobriety in the pursuits of gain is always attended with a state of mind, that must be alienated from God, and wedded as it were to sin. It might not, perhaps, lead you to the commission of such atrocious crimes as I have just alluded to, and that possibly only because times and circumstances are different; but be assured it is always the abundant source of evil. Various are the little acts of tyranny, and numerous are the
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fraudulent dealings which it produces through all the inferior orders of life. Poverty and dependence are easily oppressed; and these the worldly-minded man, instead of assisting, makes the wretched instruments of gain. There are acts of selfishness, cruelty and injustice so gross and flagrant, but yet so common among men, that few are disposed to consider them, in that point of view, which they certainly deserve. From motives of the most sordid ambition, a man will risque not only his own fortune, but endanger the peace and prosperity of whole families besides, that he might seize some probable advantage in commerce. In endeavouring to monopolize, or forestal, a particular commodity, he regards not what distresses he might bring upon the poor; he cares not if he enhances the value of the few necessaries of life to those who could scarcely procure them before, or if he wholly deprives them of them; provided the scheme of worldly advantage goes on prosperously, he neither "fears God" nor regards man:" if it fails, happy would

would it be were he alone doomed to bewail his folly ; but, alas ! he falls, like the towering elm in the midst of the vineyard, and crushes the vines which he ought to support. On either side, therefore, whether successful or not, we see cruelty and oppression, injury and outrage : and yet all this is mentioned by the world with almost perfect indifference under the specious term of SPECULATION. But will religion look on it with equal indifference, or will a good and gracious God behold those oppressed whom his bounty feeds, and suffer the blessings of his providence, as it were, to be withdrawn from them with impunity ? Be assured he will not. Soon will it appear that “ the riches of such men are corrupted, their garments moth-eaten,” (to use the language of the apostle) “ and their gold and silver cankered.” Hereafter shall “ the hire of the labourers which have reaped down their fields cry unto God, and the cries of them which have LABORED shall enter into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.”

LET

fraudulent dealings which it produces through all the inferior orders of life. Poverty and dependence are easily oppressed; and these the worldly-minded man, instead of assisting, makes the wretched instruments of gain. There are acts of selfishness, cruelty and injustice so gross and flagrant, but yet so common among men, that few are disposed to consider them, in that point of view, which they certainly deserve. From motives of the most sordid ambition, a man will risque not only his own fortune, but endanger the peace and prosperity of whole families besides, that he might seize some probable advantage in commerce. In endeavouring to monopolize, or forestal, a particular commodity, he regards not what distresses he might bring upon the poor; he cares not if he enhances the value of the few necessaries of life to those who could scarcely procure them before, or if he wholly deprives them of them; provided the scheme of worldly advantage goes on prosperously, he neither "fears God" nor regards man:" if it fails, happy would

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LET the many evils, therefore, with which an immoderate desire for the advantages of this life is invariably connected, teach you to be sober and temperate in every worldly pursuit. Besides, for what is it, after all, that you risque your innocence and peace? For happiness? The mere moralist can tell you, that happiness is not a blessing peculiar to the rich or powerful, and experience might convince us, that so far is contentment from being obtained by the desire of riches, that they who have acquired most, are in general the most eager to grasp at more. The law of Christ will teach us more important truths. We shall there learn to consider ourselves as mere sojourners here, and candidates for heaven. "But one thing is needful," says our blessed Lord. The race is short; life and death are set before us, and "as we run so shall we obtain." Frequently are we exhorted to set our affections on things above, and told, that "they who will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts that drown
" men

“ men in destruction and perdition.” And if there be a duty in the holy gospel taught more frequently and with greater energy than others, it is that which orders us to overcome the world; and which our blessed Lord so fully expressed, when he said to his disciple, “ Take up thy cross and follow me.” There also we are required to practise the mild virtues of charity, forbearance and humility. We are exhorted not to be weary in well-doing, and to watch and pray, lest we enter into temptation: but whether the worldly-minded man can fulfil any of these duties, as he ought, I leave you to judge.

YET christianity withdraws us not from the business, or the pleasures of the world, when virtuously pursued. She only requires us to “ be sober.” The merits of a christian consist in active benevolence, strengthened by the duties of piety, and improved by the exercise of prayer. The solitary retirement of the cloyster is as inconsistent with the spirit of the gospel, as its

floth and ignorance, its bigotry and superstition.

To render our commerce with the world compatible with our profession, that soundness and sobriety of mind, which the holy gospel teaches us to cultivate, are the grand requisites. We should at all times possess sufficient principle to guard us against the common temptations of sin, and should endeavour to acquire that moderation, with regard to “the things of the earth,” which will always prevail in a well-regulated mind, from the contemplation of the far more important concerns of heaven.

THE last point of view, in which I wish to enforce the apostle’s precept, is by recommending you to “be sober” as far as relates to the indulgence of the passions. This is a subject which, as I shall treat it, will more particularly relate to young persons, and to them it might be interesting and important.

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As the first step towards acquiring this sobriety of mind, beware how you cherish in your bosoms any of those romantic expectations and excessive sensibilities, which might lead you to despise the ordinary comforts and concerns of life. Nature, by giving you lively affections and active imaginations, has made you particularly prone to error in this respect; and writers who study only to amuse, often contribute to increase the delusion, by wafting you into the regions of imaginary pleasure. Before the painful, but salutary lesson of experience has been impressed upon the mind, it is easy to foster desires that never can be gratified, and still easier to admit notions of happiness that never existed in real life. If you can "be sober" while you read, and while imagination is on the wing, it is well; if after being harassed with fictitious woes, and interested, perhaps, in fictitious pleasures, you can dismiss the phantom, as you do the visions of the night, you might have little to dread: but if the contagious folly fasten on the heart; if from the misrepresentations

sentations of others, or the pleasing delusions of your own mind, you should be induced to say, in the pride of superior wisdom and superior virtue, "these are the pure pleasures of life, and here will I drink at the waters of delight with an appetite that never can be cloyed," be assured the consequence will be vexation, disappointment and sorrow: and not even to the DRUNKARD could the precept of the text be applied with greater propriety.

THIS is not the region for joys that never know abatement; here are no flowers of hope that bloom like the Amaranth of Paradise removed to heaven*; nor is there any source of happiness that flows with a pure and uninterrupted stream: the few comforts which this life affords are of a temperate and composed nature; such as chiefly spring up in the mind from the satisfactions of virtue, and the high hopes of religion. These are the only blessings that we can call permanent; all others are

* See Par. Loft.

of a fluctuating and uncertain nature ; often interrupted and often destroyed.

BE cautious, therefore, how you aspire to superior enjoyments and boast of superior capacities of pleasure ; others perhaps have trodden the same fairy-ground, and retreated with the melancholy reflection, which experience had so deeply impressed on the mind of Solomon ; “ All is vanity
“ and vexation of spirit.”

BUT disappointment is not the only misfortune that awaits this pleasing, but dangerous extravagance of the mind. In those whose chief ornaments would be the simplicity of nature, and the sincerity of truth, we frequently discover a species of false sensibility mistaken for the genuine feelings of the heart ; and, on almost every occasion, the disgusting affectation of virtue is substituted for the reality. Hence, voluptuousness is often cherished under the delusive form of sentiment ; and sensuality is sometimes indulged under the pleasing disguise

of virtuous passion. From desires, also, that were easily inflamed, because always fostered by the powers of fancy; from hopes that soon were frustrated, because romantic and vain; and from confidence that was easily abused, because excessive and misplaced, many of the vices, and much of the infamy and prostitution, which overflows the metropolis, originally proceeds.

Be assured, therefore, all the real enjoyments of life lie within the bounds of moderation; and it is for this reason that religion exhorts us to "be sober," and bids us seek them there. In your intercourse with the world, we wish you not to stifle the amiable affections of the heart; but we wish to prevent them from being the cause of misery instead of happiness. We are happy to see you detest the narrow suspicions of a worldly mind; but at the same time, we would have you cultivate that prudent circumspection, which is necessary
to

to avoid evil, and that humble wisdom, which teaches us to pursue our real good.

IN your various intercourse with your fellow-creatures, expect no more from them than the reason and experience of mankind teach you to expect. Those who think themselves formed for higher enjoyments and more exquisite delight, than fall to the lot of men in general, always undervalue, or neglect, the few moderate joys that lie before them; and often while they grasp at superior bliss embrace nothing but misery. If you would form true notions of human nature, read not the pages of the novelist and poet, but study the striking, unaffected delineations of character in the sacred volume; or view the accurate portraits of the faithful historian. These will both unite in teaching you the same lesson of Sobriety which the holy apostle inculcates: there will you find cause to grieve, and reason for expecting to suffer occasionally, from the weakness, folly and caprice, the frailties, imperfections and depravity of man.

man. By learning, therefore, to bear the necessary ills of humanity, and preparing to meet those "offences which must come," "the yoke will be easy," comparatively speaking, "and the burden light."

WHEN you shall be capable of taking a more enlarged view of things, all will appear to work together for good. The temptations of life will be found as so many trials of virtue, and its sorrows so many expedients to wean our affections from the things of this world; that we might at length repose, for true happiness, on Him only, "with whom there is fulness of joy, "and at whose right hand are pleasures "for evermore."



THE END.

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